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A Just Peace: Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, and the Moral Basis of American Foreign Policy

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A Just Peace: Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, and the Moral Basis of American Foreign Policy

by

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Dedication

To my parents, Boaz and Nehama Ofek.

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A Just Peace: Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, and the Moral Basis of American Foreign Policy

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This dissertation attempts to demonstrate the relevance and significance of American presidents' moral arguments to their foreign policy decisions. An interpretive approach that treats as important what presidents say is important to them suggests that so-called "normative" questions about rightful intervention may represent earnest and provocative moral foreign policy imperatives that are the reasons for their actions. These inherently significant imperatives deserve empirical inquiry in the field of international relations, which tends to vacate moral opinions of any agency in order to fit them into generic, deterministic mechanisms. As a contrast to this tendency, this study analyzes the pivotal decade of the 1890s, and in particular the major foreign-policy controversies of Grover Cleveland and William McKinley. What emerges from this exploration is that, even in the frenzy of his situation, each president deliberately sought, and argued for, a policy consistent with his understanding of international justice.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: The Normative-Positivist Divide in International Relations 13

The Rise of Structural Determinism 13

The Normative Debate About Intervention 17

Communitarianism 20

Humanitarianism 27

The Positivist Study of Morality in Foreign Policy 31

Two Deterministic Approaches to Moral Action in Foreign Policy 32

Instrumentalism: Morality as Strategy 32

Reductionism: Morality as Epiphenomena 37

The Foundational Efforts to Tame the "Moral Force" in Foreign Policy 43

Conclusion 57

Chapter 2: Interpreting the Moral Basis of Foreign Policy 60

Taking Ideas Seriously 61

The Interpretive Approach to Foreign Policy 65

Interpreting the Strategic Shift: 1893–1901 74

Conclusion 83

Chapter 3: The Communitarianism of Grover Cleveland 85

The Annexation of Hawaii (1893–1895) 89

The Context 90

Cleveland's Case Against Hawaiian Annexation 98
The Anglo-Venezuelan Boundary Dispute (1894–1897) 111
The Context 114
Cleveland's Case for Intervention in the Anglo-Venezuelan Dispute 118
The Cuban Rebellion (1895–1897) 144
The Context 147
Cleveland's Case Against Intervention in Cuba 150
Chapter 4: The Humanitarianism of William McKinley 170
The Cuban Crisis (1897–1898) 176
The Context 178
McKinley's Case for Intervention 180
The Acquisition of the Philippines (1898–1900) 218
The Context 219
McKinley's Case for Annexation of the Philippines 229
Conclusion 251
Bibliography 265

Introduction

In urging ratification of the United States Constitution, the American Founders argued that national security is "the most powerful director of national conduct."[1] Judgments about war and peace define the regime's character and determine the extent to which a republic can enjoy domestic peace without degrading domestic liberty. Given the unique challenges to "nations the most attached to liberty," they reasoned that national security depends on an executive office invested by a responsible individual with independent powers.[2] Abraham Lincoln, who harnessed and manipulated these powers with tremendous effect, encapsulated the inseparable connection of foreign and domestic policy when, in his Second Inaugural, he called the nation to seek and cherish "a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."[3]

While the nation's Founders provided a timeless exhortation for all future presidents, history suggests that there is no timeless category of "a just and lasting peace." There is, rather, only some particular and transient moment of peace, conditioned in part by the judgments of the executive in charge of foreign policy. Presidents must navigate distinct foreign challenges and opportunities not by mechanically applying some axiom of a just and lasting

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[1] Alexander Hamilton, Federalist Paper No. 8. In Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers (Signet Classics)* (Yale University Press, 2003).
[2] Federalist Papers No. 70, 72, 74–75. In Hamilton, Madison, and Jay.
[3] Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," March 4, 1865. R. R. Mathisen, *The Routledge Sourcebook of Religion and the American Civil War: A History in Documents* (Taylor & Francis, 2014), 427.

peace, but by deciding the character of their *own* just peace—one that advances the national interest in conformity with what they believe is morally right.

To be sure, no leader acts without some laxity in moral principle. Presidents face powerful incentives to act according to individual or collective interests that, on their own, do not entail any well-considered moral beliefs. These factors constitute the impressive range of structural, institutional, systematic, and psychological explanations for foreign policy in the field of international relations (IR).

However, these theories do not, and do not purport, to discern the complicated mixture of moral and strategic justifications that constitute how a president's *self-understood* moral opinions relate to foreign policy intentions. Most IR researchers sit at a critical height from their subjects, not so much listening *to* them as speaking *about* them—and doing so in an abstruse, foreign language. In reviewing presidents' private and public foreign policy deliberations, one would search in vain to find any hint that presidents understand their judgment as emerging from cognitively- or culturally-derived "heuristics," "socialization," or even "ideology." In making judgments about diplomatic and military matters to secure the national interest, presidents do not usually speak of "Pareto efficient outcomes," "single-peaked preferences," or "symbolic interaction."

The task of the scientist would be easier if presidents spoke of foreign policy objectives and the national interest in measurable, austere terms consistently devoid of complex, "intangible" moral considerations. But when has that been the case? Consider Donald

Trump, our era's famous champion of unadulterated national egoism. Rising to the presidency on a campaign slogan of putting "America First," he promised to return to a politics of "total allegiance to the United States of America."[4] His speeches consistently inveighed against what he regarded as foolish national generosity, promising a new direction that ruthlessly exploits the spoils of military conquest, and jealously defends American sovereignty to the exclusion of foreigners. Trump's rhetoric has been criticized for championing a blood-and-soil nationalism bereft of civic creeds and moral dignity. "Too often he seems to want to make America great without appreciating what makes it exceptional," noted two critics.[5] Still, even Trump's parochial nationalism is constantly justified by him, and his administration, as one that seeks a higher good, such as by letting the nation "shine as an example for everyone to follow."[6] His National Security Strategy unapologetically promises a new path in which the "security and prosperity" of Americans "will always come first" while also repeatedly invoking a "principled," uniquely American foreign policy that advances "peace and prosperity around the globe" and that sets a "positive example…to the world."[7]

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[4] Donald Trump, "Inaugural Address," New York Times, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/20/us/politics/donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript.html. Accessed February 2018.
[5] Ramesh Ponnuru and Rich Lowry, "For Love of Country," *National Review* (February 20, 2017). https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2017/02/20/donald-trump-inauguration-speech-and-nationalism/. Accessed February 2018.
[6] Trump, "Inaugural Address."
[7] Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Executive Office of The President, Washington, D.C., 2017), 55, 4.

These may be nationalistic platitudes qualified by other, moralistic platitudes. But the ubiquity and persistence of these latter platitudes suggest a stubborn inadequacy of espousing a foreign policy homed by mere survival, calculating acquisitiveness, and national aggrandizement. In other words, even if these platitudes are instruments of persuasion, they reveal a need—whether in the speaker, the audience, or both—for an appeal to some overriding moral principles that justify foreign policy beyond a narrow, materialistic conception of the national interest.

The rhetoric of moral conduct is grounded in the supposition that citizens and the officials representing them have the capacity and obligation to transcend perceived convenience and well-being for some higher common good—whether national, global, or spiritual.[8] Questions relating to rightful intervention and the nature and obligations of international law have animated the most searching intellectual debates for millennia, sublimating into concrete matters of statecraft, diplomacy, and war. Underlying these consequential contests of moral imperatives is a voluntarist notion that any decision for war or peace is an election—perhaps "the ultimate election"—and that "soldiers and statesmen have to make choices that are sometimes moral choices."[9]

Today, much of IR literature regards these moral controversies as "philosophic" enterprises, confined to IR's small and diminishing silo of "normative theory," or to the idle

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[8] Joseph Cropsey, "The Moral Basis of International Relations," in *Political Philosophy and the Issues of Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977).

[9] Paul Seabury and Angelo Codevilla, *War: Ends and Means* (1989), 26; Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 287.

antiquarians "caught up in 'the big questions'—what the highest nature of man *ought* to be, or what the 'right' state of government really is, or what 'justice' truly means in political terms."[10] Dominating the field are scientists who, equipped with "modern tools of analysis," examine "what *is*."[11] Underlying this distinction of "is" and "ought" is the notion that any decision for war or peace is a product of some combination of domestic and international conditions. Early in the process of this inquiry, statesmen, as research subjects, lose the dignity of believing, arguing, and explaining moral arguments. Rather, they are either treated as dupes of their (or their culture's) inescapable ideological matrix or are said to be "us[ing] morality expediently," that is, as a tool to advance "interests."[12]

The resulting dichotomy of "interests" and "norms" has led scholars who remain interested in the moral relevance of foreign policy to wonder why "there has been a great deal of reticence in IR as a whole to address the ethical dimension of world politics."[13] The thoroughgoing empirical dismissal of moral controversies is rooted in methodological decisions that privilege a kind of data—clear, unambiguous, and (often) quantifiable—that are absent in a subject's articulated self-explanations and public deliberations. When it comes to morality, IR theories tend to adapt the subject to their methods rather than adapt their methods to

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[10] Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics*, xxii.
[11] Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 14.
[12] Werner Levi, "The Relative Irrelevance of Moral Norms in International Politics," James N. Rosenau (Toronto: The Free Press, 1969), 194, 197.
[13] Toni Erskine, "Normative International Relations Theory," *International relations theory: discipline and diversity* (2013), 37.

their subject—redefining, or reducing, complex political arguments into inexorable "exogenous" factors neatly situated in parsimonious causal explanations. In seeking panoptic explanations and the discovery of systematic patterns, such methods proceed only by first at least implicitly denying the existence of statesmanship. They simplify the complex by "priming" their subjects with antecedent assumptions of venal motives or psychological complexes. In some cases, their subjects' articulated moral justifications are redefined as subjective "rationalizations" that are a function of a pre-tailored range of strategic interests and constraints. In other cases, these theories reduce decisions to manifestations of highly stylized models of strategic interaction or psycho-social processes discernible only to the trained researcher. The tendency to reject moral agency in questions of foreign policy, says one scholar, is a "puzzling feature of much International Relations scholarship."[14]

There is no point in denying the tremendous scholarly profit yielded by the methodological bets underpinning deterministic theories. By simplifying and organizing a wilderness of idiosyncratic data, "elegant definitions" of complex phenomena enable "explanatory system[s] having only a few variables."[15] Often unacknowledged, however, are these bets' prodigious costs. As the political scientist, Morton Grodzins, put it six decades ago, "Virtuosity in technique…is pleasurable to behold. It may also be highly instructive." However, theoretical

[14] Toni Erskine, "Assumptions of Moral Agency in International Relations: Responsibility Misdirected and Obscured," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations Locating Responsibility: The Problem of Moral Agency in International Relations*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal Oxford University Press, 2009), 703.
[15] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Reflections on Theory of International Politics." *Neorealism and its Critics* (1986): 330.

elegance often comes with significant self-imposed partiality toward the subject of inquiry, and "the scientist who defines his technique first and his problem second has placed second things first."[16]

This dissertation attempts to put first things first by considering the virtue of a more liminal, interpretive approach to analyzing the moral basis of American foreign-policy decisions—one that treats as important what presidents say is important to them. This approach does not deny that presidents have a variety of individual, institutional, and geostrategic incentives to not only use their independent constitutional powers but also to "sell" a foreign policy to their audience—whether to Congress, the public, the press, or foreign counterparts. Nor does this approach refute any notion that presidents are influenced by their cultural or ideological environment and so may be unwittingly pursuing a policy that conforms to their "worldview." A foreign policy may be directed at expanding American power, increasing domestic wealth, appealing to a critical electoral base; it may also be an unwitting attempt to reconcile a subjective identity with some objective reality. The point is that these incentives and subconscious inclinations—patterns and contexts that constitute the mass of explanations in IR theory—tell us nothing about a president's specific reasons or arguments for their actions. As Donald Davidson explains, "Talk of patterns and contexts does not answer the question of how reasons explain actions, since the relevant pattern or context contains both

[16] Morton Grodzins, "The Academic Mind," *Ethics* 69, no. 3 (1959), 200.

reason and action."[17] In other words, even if we accept that presidents have generic inclinations or incentives to act in a certain way, their actual reasons and arguments for their intentions give us crucial information about their political practice. Did the President view his chosen policy as a matter of national necessity? Electoral advantage? Moral obligation? However useful for methodological purposes, damning statesmen's reasons and arguments as *ex post facto* rationalizations (or exercise of "mere rhetoric") covering some underlying desire, or as a byproduct of some structural determinants, is also to damn any charitable attempt to understand their reasons and arguments in the first place. It is to guarantee the empirical irrelevance of statesmen's moral opinions before we find out what they are and how they relate to their statecraft.

IR theory would benefit from a mode of interpretation that tries to understand actors' intentions by empathetic analysis of their reasons. Such an intentional analysis entails liberation from IR's cherished orthodoxies that preordain their subjects' motives with apodeictic "microfoundations," that is, simplified models of individual beliefs and desires. It entails a stepping down from the critical heights of the social scientist, as though to ask the studied subject to explain his opinion and the purpose of his action. I argue that an intentional analysis that listens to the answers reveals the possibility that so-called "normative" questions represent earnest and coherent moral foreign policy imperatives—and that these inherently significant imperatives deserve empirical inquiry in their own terms.

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[17] Donald Davidson, "Actions, reasons, and causes." *The journal of philosophy* 60, no. 23 (1963), 692.

In that spirit, this dissertation aims to show the relevance of presidents' moral views in foreign policy by analyzing the pivotal decade of the 1890s, and in particular the foreign policies of Grover Cleveland during his second, non-consecutive term (1893–1897) and William McKinley's first, and only completed, term (1897–1900). For historians and political scientists, the waning years of the Gilded Age was a seismic transformation in American grand strategy, the transition of a nation enjoying splendid isolation to an ambitious global power with a hand in nearly every global controversy. There is no period in American history that better exemplifies the powerful appeal of highly deterministic explanations in accounting for foreign policy changes. Most prominent studies of turn-of-the-century foreign policy radically underplays the statesmanship of the time, attributing the shift in American grand strategy to long-standing pressures relating to American institutions, cultural attitudes, the political climate, and global changes in the balance of power.[18]

Deterministic accounts are uniquely capable of cutting through a wilderness of circumstantial detail to discover important, transhistorical causal factors. These advantages come at the cost of presupposing that Cleveland and McKinley's moral arguments were pretexts to—or, at most, subtexts of—the realization of inexorable exogenous forces. In seeking

[18] Thomas A. Bailey, "America's Emergence as a World Power: The Myth and the Verity," *Pacific Historical Review* 30, no. 1 (1961); Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (Holt, 1955); Richard Hofstadter, "Manifest Destiny and the Philippines," *America in Crisis* (1952); George Frost Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900–1950* (1951); Peter Trubowitz, Emily O. Goldman, and Edward Joseph Rhodes, *The Politics of Strategic Adjustment: Ideas, Institutions, and Interests* (Columbia University Press, 1999); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

the roots of a historic shift in grand strategy, these explanations look through a lens that preclude the articulated arguments of the constitutionally empowered actors on the scene. In so doing, they massively underplay the discrete differences between Cleveland and McKinley and the profound contrast between the two presidents' moral reasoning as it related to their respective foreign policies. The arguments and pronouncements of these presidents too hastily fall casualty to a prior, unquestioned axiom that the utterances of leaders are superficial, derivative, or subnational manifestations of broader economic, cultural, or political processes.

A more painstaking and patient textual analysis begins with taking seriously the possibility that statesmen can, and do, give reasons that are not reducible to post-hoc rationalizations, narrow strategic pretexts, or duplicitous manipulations. Such an analysis leaves open the possibility that moral opinions were thoughtful, not merely a witting or unwitting elucidation of an "untouchable *zeitgeist*."[19] However flawed or intellectually inadequate, the moral justifications articulated by the two presidents in making foreign policy decisions were nevertheless sufficiently coherent to deserve the dignity of charitable interpretation.

These are arguments that present contrasting understandings regarding the international duties of the nation, the conditions of rightful foreign intervention and territorial acquisition, the nature and limits of sovereign rights, and the connection between international law and human rights. As I will argue, Cleveland's major foreign policy decisions during his second term—his withdrawal of the Hawaiian annexation treaty, his interposition into the

[19] Valerie M. Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2007), 11.

British-Venezuela border dispute, and his vociferous resistance to intervention in Cuba—were all anchored in a communitarian notion of international justice. He repeatedly spoke of the United States as a member of a family of co-equal nations living under a uniform law with global authority. In his view, it was precisely the great might of a global power that made its strategic temptations stronger, respect for the presumed sovereignty of other law-abiding states more difficult, and demonstrated subservience to international law more meaningful and praiseworthy. His successor, by contrast, rejected the notion that state sovereignty constitutes any categorical right against forcible intervention, regardless of the presence of a direct threat. Instead, McKinley articulated a humanitarian understanding of international justice whereby a state's legitimacy must be earned by demonstrating right conduct toward its citizens. In justifying his decisions to intervene in Cuba and to annex the Philippines, McKinley argued that the United States may rightfully use its discretion to judge, monitor, and sanction violations of humanity, regardless of whether a sovereign power is meeting its legal obligations by communitarian standards. Even in the frenzy of the moment, each president thought carefully about the requirements of international justice as a means of securing or confirming the nation's virtue.

This dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 1 surveys the normative-positivist divide in IR that has contributed to Procrustean methodological commitments. On one side, a rich "normative" debate between the communitarian and humanitarian understandings of international justice has sought to distinguish between right and wrong motives in foreign

intervention. On the other side, a prolific positivist tradition has sought to discover the underlying determinants of morality in foreign policy while dismissing the possibility or value in distinguishing between high moral motives and low material needs. I argue that these deterministic perspectives are rooted less in the requirements of scientific propriety than in the decidedly political (and even polemical) program of the field's realist founders. From this analysis of the field I develop, in Chapter 2, an argument in favor of an interpretive analysis that is more flexible, less concerned with causal generalities, and more sensitive to intentions of decision-makers as elucidated by their stated arguments. In Chapters 3 and 4, I undertake a provisional, question-driven investigation into the moral basis of Cleveland's and McKinley's foreign policies.

Chapter 1: The Normative-Positivist Divide in International Relations

In this chapter, I argue that normative theory presents thought-provoking questions about the conditions of rightful intervention that are relevant only if we remain open to the possibility that statesmen have the capacity and willingness to exercise ethical judgment. However, positivist IR methods do not consider the relevance of these moral questions because of their commitment to methodologies that are ill-suited to interpreting the significance of moral opinions as presented by statesmen. Fortunately, as I argue, these methodological decisions stem less from the inescapable requirements of science than from the field's political foundations in twentieth-century realism. Understanding these roots is the necessary first step to bridging the unhelpful divide between normative and positivist methods.

The Rise of Structural Determinism

In his famous 1966 essay, Martin Wight of the London School of Economics argued that the field of IR has failed to contribute to any serious and coherent body of moral and intellectual work on morality in the modern state system. According to Wight, "international theory is marked, not only by paucity but also by intellectual and moral poverty."[20] Wight's penetrating essay illuminated the segregation of international relations into two realms: one small, increasingly diminished scholarly realm subjected to regime-defining questions about

[20] Martin Wight, "Why is There No International Theory?," *International Relations* 2, no. 1 (1960).

moral principles; and a second, growing, positivist approach concerned with systematizing patterns in interstate relations.

This second approach is best represented by the dominance of structural theories, and especially neorealism, in IR theory. Neorealists described their theory as a breakthrough akin to the "Copernican revolution" because it finally provided an answer to the "the great unanswered" question of international-political studies relating to the causes of war, discovering the decisive importance of system-level, as opposed to the individual- or state-level, determinants of state action.[21] According to neorealism's estimable representative, Kenneth Waltz, the anarchical nation-state system compels all states to seek survival as necessitated by their placement in an international system, and especially by their proximity to great powers. "Analysis of the consequences arising from the framework of state action" explains state behavior.[22]

A theory resting on the constraints imposed on all states by structural determinants is one that rejects the utility of foreign policy studies, or of understanding international politics from the standpoint of statesmen or the character of regimes that they lead.[23] The distribution of power in an international system "is not so much imposed by statesmen on events as

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[21] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Waveland Press, 2010), 69.

[22] Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (Columbia University Press, 2001), 231.

[23] Waltz's theory rejects inquiry into leaders' intentions on the argument that, although leaders' intentions may have some impact on short-term foreign policy, the national interest is driven by survival, and is the basis for long-term and systematic outcomes. Thus, Waltz averred: "I am writing a theory of international politics, not of foreign policy." Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 175. Waltz has warned against expecting his theory to "explain the particular policies of states." Waltz, 121–22; also see Waltz, "International politics is not foreign policy," *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (1996): 54–57.

it is imposed by events on statesmen."[24] States are like actors in an economic market—their interests are fixed and "self-regarding."[25] Whereas an economist assumes players seek to maximize profit, the IR theorist assumes that "states seek to ensure their survival."[26]

A student of history and political theory, Waltz was aware that such an assumption is not a "realistic description of the impulse that lies behind every act of state."[27] Indeed, he regarded such assumptions about "the motivation of the actors" as "a radical simplification" of observable reality.[28] To proceed with any theory based on a "brazenly false" assumption that treats men as single-minded maximizers of a single motive, "the world must be drastically simplified; subtleties must be rudely pushed aside, and reality must be grossly distorted."[29]

Waltz nevertheless defended the use of such a "false impression of the world," arguing that neorealism's conceptual liberties are "made for the sake of constructing a theory."[30] A structural theory "is not an edifice of truth and not a reproduction of reality" but a mental picture that can isolate certain connections in a world of "infinite materials."[31] By "moving away from 'reality,' not staying close to it," neorealism can bracket innumerable variables,

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[24] Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis,*209.
[25] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 74, 91–92.
[26] Waltz, 91.
[27] Waltz, 92.
[28] Waltz, 91.
[29] Waltz, "Realist thought and neorealist theory," *Journal of International Affairs* (1990), 31–32.
[30] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 72, 91.
[31] Waltz, 8.

achieving parsimony and elegance possible only when a theory operates at a high level of abstraction.[32] However much violence an assumption does to reality, "the question to ask of the assumption, as ever, is not whether it is true but whether it is the most sensible and useful one that can be made."[33] A "useful" assumption is one that leads to an explanation of regularities and continuity, and can predict international-political outcomes, "including events that none or few of the actors may like."[34] Waltz recognized that, just as there is no economic market without firms, there is no international system without states. However, by constraining "the freedom of the units, their behavior and the outcomes of their behavior become predictable."[35] By design, then, structure-based theories trade descriptive richness for prediction, attempting to discover the determinants of behavior that are exogenous (or external to) individuals' unique, contextual self-understanding and articulated justifications.[36]

Waltz's structural determinism is rooted in the broader social-scientific belief (a "belief" since it is yet unproven) that "factual propositions cannot be derived from ethical ones by any process of reasoning, nor can ethical propositions be compared directly with the

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[32] Waltz, 7. Waltz wrote that his theory "abstract[s] from every attribute of states except their capabilities." Waltz, 99; see also 80. Elsewhere, Waltz wrote: "Elegant definitions of structure enable one to fashion an explanatory system having only a few variables. If we add more variables, the explanatory system becomes more complicated…" Waltz, "Reflections on Theory of International Politics," in *Neorealism and its Critics* (1986), 330.

[33] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 91; see also 172.

[34] Waltz, 69.

[35] Waltz, 72. According to Waltz, what any state or statesman desires at any moment is empirically trivial to predicting how general conditions (that is, systematic constraints) relate to war. See, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis,*37, 40, 231–232.

[36] Michael Nicholson, "The Continued Significance of Positivism," *International theory: Positivism and beyond* (1996), 13, 136; John Vasquez, "The Post-Positivist Debate," in *Unset International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. K. Booth S. Smith and M. Zawelski Cambridge University Press, 1996), 230; Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 128.

facts—since they assert 'ought' rather than facts."[37] According to Waltz, moral arguments are irrelevant because they do not, and cannot, change the immutably conflictual nature of the international system.[38] Waltz asks: "A good cause may justify any war, but who can say in a dispute between states whose cause is just?"[39] Today, much of positivist IR consider claims of justice as so obviously subjective, as so inescapably conditioned by context, that they are dismissed as "prescriptive" wishes—as concerned purely with "values" rather than "facts."[40]

THE NORMATIVE DEBATE ABOUT INTERVENTION

The great success of structural determinism in spurring a large class of elegant theoretical systems has come at the cost of meaningful engagement with the ethical dimensions of

[37] Herbert A. Simon, "Administrative Behavior," (2013), 56.

[38] Waltz seems to rule out the possibility of heterogeneous nations uniting under a single power. See *Theory of International Politics*, 111–112, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis,*228, 238.

[39] Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis,*113.

[40] Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to international relations: theories and approaches* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 260–261; Arnold Wolfers and Laurence Martin, eds, *The Anglo-American Tradition in Foreign Affairs: Readings from Thomas More to Woodrow Wilson* (Yale University Press, 1956), ix; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics* (Public Affairs, 2011), 14. As Michael Desch argues, the distinction between "facts" and "values" is averred but rarely followed in practice. "Most realists reconcile the disjunction between their private moral and ethical codes, and the harsh reality of international politics, by embracing Weber's notion of value-free social science in their approach to studying international relations. Like Weber, most realists are not really value-free; in fact, they often have an explicit ethical agenda." However, Desch's own evidence, and his very (commendable) efforts in searching for it, suggests that the ethical agenda is more often implicit—that contemporary realists see themselves as "fact"-seeking scientists, even as they unwittingly reveal their "values." Michael C. Desch, "It is kind to be cruel: the humanity of American Realism," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 3 (2003), 419.

foreign policy, as represented by the now-small scholarly niche represented by IR's "normative theories."[41] Although the moral philosophy of international relations has roots in antiquity, and up until the twentieth century comprised the whole study of foreign affairs, it is now absent in most IR departments, "relegated to religion departments, theological seminaries and a few Catholic universities."[42]

Normative theorists protest the fact-value distinction, pointing out that the rules, institutions, and decisions responsible for international conduct have moral content.[43] On a methodological level, normative theory is grounded in the voluntarist notion that it is possible and desirable for citizens, soldiers, and statesmen to use the basic human capacity of self-command to discern between necessity and choice.[44] Further, most normative theorists assume that scholars may discern and evaluate the reasoning of statesmen who speak in the name of moral duty and national security.[45] Beyond this basic starting point, normative the-

[41] According to Chris Brown, "by normative international relations theory is meant that body of work which addresses the moral dimension of international relations and the wider questions of meaning and interpretation generated by the discipline. At its most basic it addresses the ethical nature of the relations between communities." Chris Brown, Terry Nardin, and Nicholas Rengger, eds. *International relations in political thought: Texts from the ancient Greeks to the first world war* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.
[42] Michael Walzer, "The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success)," *Social Research*, 69, No. 4, 928.
[43] Toni Erskine, "Assumptions of Moral Agency in International Relations: Responsibility Misdirected and Obscured," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations Locating Responsibility: The Problem of Moral Agency in International Relations*, edited by Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, (Oxford University Press, 2009), 40.
[44] Mervyn Frost, *Ethics in international relations: A constitutive theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.
[45] Critical and postmodern theorists are an exception.

ory has no unifying position; it represents no "canon" of accumulated or progressing wisdom. Rather, it is another way of describing a series of debates about the moral basis of international relations.[46]

Normative theorists attempt to clarify and organize the diversity in theoretical positions by categorizing the moral requirements of rightful intervention into two schools: communitarianism and humanitarianism.[47] According to communitarians (also knowns as "liberal communitarians" or "statists"), states are rights-bearing members in a society of states. Simply by their non-threatening existence, states deserve presumed sovereign legitimacy from other states, which must refrain from forcibly intervening in their domestic politics. According to humanitarians (also known as "cosmopolitans"), states enjoy rights only as far as they abide by a commitment to human rights. When a regime shows lack of commitment to basic human rights, other states have a right and perhaps a responsibility to take forcible action against the transgressive state.

The purpose of this critical review is twofold. First, the questions and concerns raised in the debate over legitimate intervention will serve as the backdrop for the case studies in Chapters 3 and 4 in which we will assess how (or to what degree) such questions and concerns were addressed in practice by Presidents Cleveland and McKinley. The competing theoretical classifications are highly idealized heuristics; they are not predictive models. They

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[46] Thomas L. Pangle and Peter J. Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

[47] The division here is adopted, with some amendments, from Eric Heinze, *Waging Humanitarian War: The Ethics, Law, and Politics of Humanitarian Intervention* (SUNY Press, 2009), chapter 1.

can therefore discipline historical analysis by bringing to the fore the most fundamental disagreements in moral outlooks. Second, and more immediate to our purposes, the debate between communitarianism and humanitarianism illuminates that thinking critically about such moral questions in foreign policy entails methodological voluntarism, or some openness to the possibility of moral volition, responsibility, and judgment.

Communitarianism

According to communitarianism, the sovereignty of each political community is the most fundamental moral element of international relations.[48] States are rights-bearing, co-equal entities and their relations are bound by laws that aim to protect their unique, internal political life. Communitarians believe that there is no escaping the particularity of political membership and the primacy of national independence in matters of international affairs. Communitarian justice demands virtuous restraint and intellectual humility in service of the maintenance of civilized relations among the "society of nations" or (in older terms) the "family of nations."

[48] As understood today, sovereignty is a legal concept coeval (and arguably inseparable from) early liberal social-contract theory. The idea is that individuals are inherently divided by their self-interests. To attain lasting security, it is necessary for individuals in a specific territory to transfer all rights and powers to an undivided "sovereign representative" empowered to enact binding, enforceable laws that protect individuals' private spheres from domestic and foreign dangers. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Routledge, 2016), chapter 15.

Communitarianism appears in the background of a wide range of contemporary IR theories. It is evident in neorealism's (usually implicit) moral exhortations for Western powers to discipline and limit foreign policy aims. As a thoroughgoing doctrine, communitarianism is famously associated with Michael Walzer's work, especially his *Just and Unjust Wars*. However, communitarianism dates back centuries, and is well-presented by the German philosopher Christian Wolff (1679–1754) and his argument that, just as civil society is a social contract among rights-enjoying individuals, states have rights in the community of nations by their mere existence:

> Nations certainly can be regarded as nothing else than individual free persons living in a state of nature, and therefore the same duties are to be imposed upon them, both as regards themselves and as regards others, and the rights arising therefrom, which are prescribed by the law of nature and are bestowed on individual men, because by nature they are born free, and are united by no other bond than that of nature.[49]

For communitarians, there can be no real social pact among nations; politics is fundamentally about membership in a defined group or territory, and individuals depend on a self-enclosed political community to practice politics and exercise their rights.[50] "[A]s individuals need a home, so rights require a location," Walzer writes.[51] In principle, each state has a right to police and coercively guarantee the maintenance of its preservation and independence. The right of a state to act with force is derived from its right to protect itself in a

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[49] Christian Wolff, *Jus Gentium Methodo Scientifica Pertractatum in the Classics of International Law, Vol. II:* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1934), 5.

[50] Even though individuals do not literally contract with each other to a civil government, the purpose of any civil government is to represent the interests of people. The right of individuals against foreign intervention is prior to the right against their own state officials because the former depends on the latter. Michael Walzer, "The Moral Standing of States: A Response to Four Critics," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 9, no. 3 (1980).

[51] Walzer, 228.

world that has no "higher entity."[52] Consequently, a state cannot extend that right to punish transgressors that have not injured or threatened it.[53]

What follows from this notion of state equality and political community is that, by meeting some baseline of functional existence and "fitness," states deserve some degree of presumed legitimacy from other statesmen.[54] If a state's institutions are indigenous, appear to represent a nation, and do not threaten other states, then that state deserves to enjoy its peaceful sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Communitarians believe that it is difficult, if not impossible, for a foreign leader to judge whether there is fitness between the government and its people. There is no foreign arbiter who can judge among disparate civil movements, gauge their strength, and figure out the point at which an established government has lost authority. The problems inherent in evaluating legitimacy means that even tyrannies have rights, and outsiders "must act as if they were legitimate" even if those states do not, in fact, enjoy the support of their rebellious subjects.[55] According to Walzer, the presumption of legitimacy "is simply the respect that

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[52] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 113. See also *Man, the State, and War*, 190, 201.

[53] Emmerich De Vattel, *The Law of Nations; or, Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns* (Philadelphia: J.W. Johnson & C, 1883), Book II, Chapter 1, Paragraph 7.

[54] Communitarians concede that this is not scientific or easily applied standard. Walzer explicitly likens communitarian contract theory to Burkean conservatism which sees a community as a contract among "the living, the dead, and those who are yet to be born." Walzer, 211.

[55] Even submitting that citizens' right to self-determination includes the right of rebellion, that right cannot transfer to other states. Indigenous rebellions are, by definition, a manifestation of communal politics; foreign intervention into them denies the integrity of communal politics, however messy. Even if partisans of the rebellion invite a foreign state to intervene on their behalf, there is no obvious way by which to judge whether the movement represents the community (and once it does become clear, the movement no longer depends on intervention anyway). In fact, illegitimate intervention paradoxically denies the political or moral significance of a revolution because the intervention is implicitly making negative judgments about its ability to garner domestic support. Walzer, 213–214.

foreigners owe to a historic community and to its internal life."[56] The necessary corollary to presumed legitimacy is the duty of statesmen to protect their citizens from the intervention of foreigners since such intervention represents a compromise of the community's political integrity.

The principle of presumed legitimacy curtails the possible moral grounds to intervene because it insists on neutrality toward a regime's character and institutions.[57] No state can justly intervene on the mere basis that it considers another regime's institutions or behavior toward its citizens as oppressive.[58] Unless its preservation or independence is threatened, no state has a right to arrogate to itself the responsibility of sanctioning any natural law duties to humanity.[59] As Wolff explained, rulers are accountable only to their respective territorial jurisdictions, and the principle of sovereignty means that they can punish a state that has

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[56] Walzer, 212.

[57] Thomas L. Pangle and Peter J. Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 180–181.

[58] Walzer, "The Moral Standing of States: A Response to Four Critics," 216. Even autocratic governments that deserve moral disapprobation also deserve to have their basic rights to non-intervention respected. On this, see also Wolff, *Jus Gentium Methodo Scientifica Pertractatum in the Classics of International Law, Vol. II*, para. 252; Charles R. Beitz, "The Moral Standing of States Revisited," *Reading Walzer* (2013), 330.

[59] Although communitarians argue that the territorial boundary of a state reflects the boundary of its moral responsibilities, they do not insist that states or should necessarily behave in amoral or purely self-regarding ways with other states. In fact, foreign policy may very well be restrained and shaped by the regime's moral principles. But a state cannot legitimately project any actionable moral standard on other states if doing so violates another state's sovereignty. Doing so is wrong because it violates a state's—or, more concretely, its citizens—from practicing politics on that community's own terms.

harmed them.[60] However, the same principle prohibits a state from exercising any enforcement powers belonging to another state.[61] The upshot of the communitarian presumption of legitimacy is a highly restrictive notion of rightful intervention.

Elevating sovereignty to such a high standing means that communitarianism discourages ethical appraisal of other states—an abdication of judgment whose logical endpoint is moral relativism and the blind hegemony of parochial national interest.[62] Of course, such intellectual paralysis is wholly out of communitarianism's spirit, which demands of statesmen high regard for their moral responsibility in contributing to both domestic *and* international peace. Communitarianism promotes domestic liberty by restraining ambitious leaders searching for a rationale to expand their power, recognizing that usurpers have always justified their dominion on a philanthropic basis.[63] At the same time, communitarianism's call for restraint does not entail isolationist indifference; even when communitarians critique particular acts of war, they expect leaders to exercise their power to use force. For Walzer, just war theory, as a abroad tradition of military ethics, assumes the practical possibility of fighting just wars and

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[60] Wolff, *Jus Gentium Methodo Scientifica Pertractatum* in the Classics of International Law, Vol. II, para. 272.
[61] "By nature no nation has the right to any act which belongs to the exercise of the sovereignty of another nation. For sovereignty, as it exists in a people or originally in a nation, is absolute. Since, therefore, the perfection of sovereignty consists in its exercise independently of the will of any other, all the acts of any nation which belong to the exercise of civil sovereignty are altogether independent of the will of any other nation. Therefore, by nature no nation can have the right to perform any act which belongs to the exercise of the sovereignty of another nation." Wolff, para. 255.
[62] Beitz, "The Moral Standing of States Revisited"; Cropsey, "The Moral Basis of International Relations"; Peter Lamb and Fiona Robertson-Snape, *Historical Dictionary of International Relations* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 225.
[63] Vattel, *The Law of Nation,* Book II, Chapter 1, Paragraph 7.

of recognizing them as such. It is "a doctrine of radical responsibility, because it holds political and military leaders responsible, first of all, for the well-being of their own people, but also for the well-being of innocent men and women on the other side."[64] In some cases, for example, communitarian concern for the welfare of other states may lead to rightful abrogation of sovereign agreements.[65] In other cases, a non-threatened state may nevertheless intervene against outright genocide because such a crime constitutes an unambiguous shock to the "moral conscience of mankind."[66] Communitarianism poses "hard tests" for humanitarian intervention not due to nationalistic indifference or pedantic legalism but because such intervention "is an expensive business" that risks "significant negative consequences" on both sides.[67]

Indeed, it is precisely the sensitivity to the limits of any state to guarantee global security and justice that contributes to global security.[68] Global evils, diagnosed perfectly in the abstract, prove intractable when actual state resources are directed to combat them.[69] Communitarians are sensitive to the slippery tendency of especially powerful nations, acting out

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[64] Michael Walzer, "The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success)," 935.

[65] See, for example, Vattel's argument that alliances and treaties cannot force assistance to unjust causes. On this general point, see also Richard Wasserstrom, "Review of Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*," *Harvard Law Review* 92, no. 2 (1978); Fernando R. Tesón, *Humanitarian Intervention an Inquiry Into Law and Morality*.

[66] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*, 107.

[67] Michael Walzer, "The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success)," 940.

[68] The legacy of communitarianism is apparent in the strident arguments in favor of a foreign policy of restraint. "An America that showed restraint could help the world find ways to cope with the problems of the many by not claiming for itself the responsibilities that are truly global." See Harvey M. Sapolsky, Eugene Gholz, and Caitlin Talmadge. *US defense politics: the origins of security policy* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 21.

[69] Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky. "Come home, America: The strategy of restraint in the face of temptation." *International Security* 21, no. 4 (1997): 5-48.

of the highest motives, to expand their responsibility beyond the bounds of what they can realistically manage; ambitious international projects aimed at doing good often exacerbate the evils they seek to expunge.[70] Understanding that the well-being of innocent people in other states also depends on their membership to a political community discourages states from using the pretext of global justice to extend their own ambitions, or to exacerbate the evils they seek to address.[71] Powerful nations are subjected to the greatest (but also the most foolhardy) temptations to do good, "to end conflict in a contentious world" and to be certain "that the solution it seeks to impose is a just one."[72] As the eighteenth-century diplomat Emmerich De Vattel argued, when a state arrogates to itself the mantle of justice, it almost inevitably increases the length of a war and the cruelty of its conduct.[73] Consequently, it is when temptations are highest—such as when a foreign state seems most illegitimate and censurable, when there is some pretext for flouting an international agreement, or when the positive gains of intervention are highest—that commitment to respect for sovereignty is most morally meaningful.[74] So, far from signifying moral apathy, a policy of neutrality to global evils can be a testament to the highest code of conduct. As Walzer puts it, "neutrality is a feature of all the

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[70] Harvey M. Sapolsky, Eugene Gholz, and Caitlin Talmadge. *US defense politics: the origins of security policy* (New York: Routledge, 2008), chapter 2, esp. 17–21.

[71] David Miller, *National responsibility and global justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[72] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 201.

[73] See Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, III.12.188; Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, 113–114.

[74] It also means that positive treaties between states are an essential part of converting international obligations and promises into enforceable rights. The highest duty of any state is to fulfill its legal obligations to other states, and that paramount legal obligation is in avoiding unnecessary violations of sovereignty. See, for example, Wolff's discussions of missionaries and interstate agreements. Wolff, *Jus Gentium Methodo Scientifica Pertractatum in the Classics of International Law, Vol. II*, para. 262, 371–372.

rules of war; without it there could be no rules at all but only permissions addressed to the Forces of Good entitling them to do whatever is necessary (though only what is necessary) to overcome their enemies."[75] Thus, the prudential arguments grounding communitarianism and neutrality follow from what communitarians consider to be the highest principles of justice in international relations.

Humanitarianism

If the communitarian common good is based on the principle of sovereignty, why does it make exceptions to its non-interventionism when sovereignty protects patently unjust states? Moreover, how do communitarians discern when interventions are limited to appeals of conscience, and when a state can undertake military action? According to humanitarians, communitarianism is uncomfortable with intervention but, as its qualifications show, recognizes the absurdity of neutrality toward immoral, oppressive state behavior. Humanitarians like Charles Beitz argue that, even if a state has some moral standing, it is not incumbent on all states to presume such an unqualified degree of legitimacy.[76] States are not like individuals in that they lack the autonomous quality of human beings to enjoy presumptive rights.[77] The communitarian acceptance of domestic tyranny and prohibition of international enforcement is nonsensical; coercion—whether by a domestic government or an external party—

[75] Walzer, "The Moral Standing of States: A Response to Four Critics," 217.
[76] David Luban, "Just War and Human Rights," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1980), 173.
[77] Charles R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 80–81.

must always be justified by principles of justice. According to Beitz, "The analogue of the moral autonomy of persons, at the level of states, is a state's conformity with appropriate principles of domestic justice."[78]

For humanitarians, it is individual rights—not state rights—that constitutes international justice. A regime's sovereignty and the rights conferred to it are contingent on whether that state respects human rights. Humanitarians argue that any meaningful notion of political self-determination in a community assumes some level of domestic justice (such as civil and political freedom).[79] If a state is coercive or cruel toward its citizens, then the state "betrays the very purpose for which it exists," and can no longer count on any right against intervention by another state.[80] Leaders must not only avoid massacring their citizens but must demonstrate some higher commitment to rights. According to Beitz, "only those states whose institutions satisfy the appropriate principles of justice can legitimately demand to be respected" as maintaining a right against intervention.[81] Thus, humanitarianism holds regime type and behavior as highly relevant to questions of intervention. A regime with oppressive institutions has no right to non-intervention.[82] Humanitarians argue that it is morally permissible for other states to intervene for humanitarian improvements, even if it is not aimed at preventing any specific atrocity.[83]

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[78] Beitz, 80–81.
[79] Beitz, 71.
[80] Tesón, *Humanitarian Intervention an Inquiry Into Law and Morality*, 15.
[81] Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, 81.
[82] Heinze, *Waging Humanitarian War: The Ethics, Law, and Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, 30.
[83] Heinze, 30.

The implication of humanitarianism is that the threshold of legitimate intervention is much lower than that of communitarianism. The logical endpoint of humanitarian permissiveness is almost limitless intervention for philanthropic improvement, resulting in perpetual global instability and warfare.[84] As Walzer put it, "The work of the virtuous is never finished."[85] Communitarians point out that intervention on the basis of humanitarian improvement is tantamount to a declaration that the target government is illegitimate because it has failed to protect its citizens. That meant that a humanitarian war, from the outset, is an effort at regime change—a project.[86]

Like communitarians, humanitarians have looked to rescue their principles from self-defeating extremes by adopting some exceptions to their theories. For example, they argue that intervention must be executed proportionally to the abuse it aims to stop, and that indigenous citizens must approve of it.[87] Meanwhile, critics point out that such utilitarianism is highly contingent on dubious judgments, based on necessarily limited knowledge that may serve as pretexts for self-interested intervention masked as moral reform.[88]

Communitarianism and humanitarianism each claim to advance some notion of justice, fairness, and the common good that is grounded on a particular understanding of what

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[84] Charles R. Beitz, "Bounded Morality: Justice and the State in World Politics," *International Organization* 33, no. 3 (1979), 413.
[85] Michael Walzer, "The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success)," 940.
[86] Walzer, 939.
[87] Beitz, 415; Heinze, *Waging Humanitarian War: The Ethics, Law, and Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, 26–27; Tesón, *Humanitarian Intervention an Inquiry Into Law and Morality*.
[88] The *ad hoc* consequentialism of humanitarians is seemingly self-defeating because it may justify violations of human rights as long those violations are motivated by humanitarian concerns. Heinze, *Waging Humanitarian War: The Ethics, Law, and Politics of Humanitarian Intervention*, 26–27.

is legally permissible, politically possible, and morally imperative. For communitarians, states have a moral standing (and therefore a right against foreign intervention) because they are political communities of individuals who depend on territorial integrity free of interference to exercise their political membership. According to humanitarians, communitarians put conditional rights (of states) before foundational or primary rights (of individuals). Humanitarians argue that the right against intervention depends on a government treating its citizens with certain human rights; when a state does not do so, it is the responsibility of other states to act against them.

Although the finer points in the debate about just intervention can develop into recondite legal and philosophic quarrels, they advance questions that have never been confined to cloistered academic halls. In fact, they are questions that have repeatedly penetrated the highest levels of decision-making and public deliberation about international controversies.[89] Both perspectives assume that those who make foreign policy decisions are responsible agents with some level of freedom and ability to reason through alternatives that have moral implications. As Walzer explains, while war is sometimes waged under the aegis of unrelenting necessity, it is more commonly the case that "soldiers and statesmen have to make choices that are sometimes moral choices."[90] The inherently moral dimension of acts of war means that they cannot simply be reduced to necessity. "Justice still needs to be defended; decisions

[89] See, for example, Frances V. Harbour, *Thinking about international ethics: moral theory and cases from American foreign policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).
[90] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 287.

about when and how to fight require constant scrutiny."[91] The competing moral claims advanced by each perspective assumes that it is possible to appraise such moral choices according to the persuasiveness of their justifications. As I argue next, positivist studies of morality in foreign policy not only avoid such presumptions but make methodological commitments that effectively rule them out of empirical consideration.

THE POSITIVIST STUDY OF MORALITY IN FOREIGN POLICY

In the last few decades, and especially in the last few years, social scientists, including IR theorists, have renewed efforts to study how moral attitudes shape foreign policy.[92] However, positivist IR has avoided serious inquiry into the significance of the questions raised by the long-kindled philosophic tradition relating to justice in foreign intervention. For positivists who do not dismiss ethical questions in international affairs as irrelevant, morality is either a handmaiden of interest or an epiphenomenal reflex rooted in sociological or biological needs.[93]

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[91] Walzer, "The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success)," 935.

[92] For a few recent examples, which include helpful review of the literature, see Scott Clifford*, et al.*, "Moral Concerns and Policy Attitudes: Investigating the Influence of Elite Rhetoric," *Political Communication* 32, no. 2 (2015); Joshua D. Kertzer*, et al.*, "Moral Support: How Moral Values Shape Foreign Policy Attitudes," *The Journal of Politics* 76, no. 3 (2014); Sarah Kreps and Sarah Maxey, "Mechanisms of Morality: Sources of Support for Humanitarian Intervention," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2017).

[93] For an example of what it means to say that morality is irrelevant, consider Werner Levi: "Moral norms are not ends in themselves. Nations do not act to translate moral norms into reality…. moral norms are made to function, or more correctly are intended to function in support of the nation…. The behavior of nations indicates that most of the time interests, judged generally apart from and sometimes in deliberate disregard of moral norms, have been decisive in shaping behavior." Levi, "The Relative Irrelevance of Moral Norms in International Politics," 194–195.

Two positivist approaches—described here as "instrumentalist" and "reductionist"—dominate current IR research on morality. Each redefines morality to fit methods that preclude the possibility of genuine moral agency and the study of moral arguments. In the second part of this section, I argue that these deterministic tendencies baked into the positivist approaches are rooted less in the requirements of scientific procedures than in the inertia of prejudices that grew out of the field's political mission, as defined by its realist founders.

Two Deterministic Approaches to Moral Action in Foreign Policy

According to the instrumentalist perspective, moral language is a manifestation of rational egoism—a strategy of power-seeking "ideology," or expression of subjective "preferences" that must be examined in light of the actor's strategic constraints. Meanwhile, an alternative, reductionist perspective, treats morality as an epiphenomenon (or byproduct) of psychological traits, often rooted in biological or evolutionary mechanisms. In the name of empirical rigor, both perspectives start from ontological assumptions that redefine morality in such a way as to preclude meaningful moral autonomy, thus narrowing the range of alternative explanations of foreign policy motivations.

Instrumentalism: Morality as Strategy

Researchers who adopt some form of the instrumentalist perspective explain moral opinions and justifications by asking what the actor gains from believing or uttering them.

Usually adopting formalistic models of rationality, this approach views moral-sounding utterances as strategic, ego-driven instruments of power or expression of subjective "utility" that is outside the scope of a researcher's evaluation.[94]

Scholars following instrumentalist methods examine the moral language of political officials as a tool of domestic or diplomatic manipulation toward some (largely self-serving) end, such as garnering political support.[95] In her study of moral language in presidential statements, Colleen J. Shogan argues that moral appeals are a "strategic tool" used by American presidents "to enhance their political leadership and strengthen existing authority," even when doing so is untethered to policy arguments.[96] Applied to foreign policy, the instrumentalist logic suggests that expressions of moral imperatives, whether in the domestic or diplomatic context, are meant to enhance the "authority and credibility" of leaders who "sell" or

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[94] As Robert A. Dahl put it: "rigorous analysis in a positivistic spirit can leave nothing more to the 'common good' than simply the set of subjective preferences that happen to be those of the observer who invokes the phrase." Robert A. Dahl, "Political Theory: Truth and Consequences Sovereignty: An Inquiry Into the Political Good," *World Politics* 11, no. 1 (1958), 91. By design, goal-oriented models must delineate a goal and a goal-seeking strategy. Even if an actor seeks a goal that is perfectly altruistic, his moral appeals are examined as an instrument rather than a testament or elucidation of his reasons. IR in the rationalist tradition imitates modern economics' perchance for elegant, parsimonious, mathematical models of human behavior and does so by beginning with fixed assumptions about self-interest. As one scholar put it, "rationalist models…tend to rely on relatively strict micro-level assumptions about where actors derive utility from, how they calculate costs and benefits, how they make judgments under certainty, and so on." Joshua D. Kertzer, "Microfoundations in International Relations," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 34, no. 1 (2016), 5.
Ernst Fehr and Urs Fischbacher, "Why Social Preferences Matter—The Impact of Non-Selfish Motives on Competition, Cooperation and Incentives," 112 (2002); Matthew Rabin, "A Perspective on Psychology and Economics," *European Economic Review* 46, no. 4-5 (2002), 65-67; David A. Lake, "Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations of the Iraq War," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (2010).
[95] Keena Lipsitz, "Playing With Emotions: The Effect of Moral Appeals in Elite Rhetoric," *Political Behavior* (2017).
[96] Colleen J. Shogan, *The Moral Rhetoric of American Presidents* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 4.

"frame" their chosen policy to some end.[97] Thus, following Karl Mannheim and the Public Choice theory he inspired, scholars in the instrumentalist tradition argue that moral opinions and imperatives of political actors are best understood as "tainted with its espousers' desire to gain power"—that is, as expressions of "ideology."[98] To study morality as ideology "means that opinion, statements, propositions, and systems of ideas are not taken at their face value but are interpreted in the light of the life-situation of the one who expresses them."[99] To study ideology specifically from the instrumentalist perspective is to view opinions and statements as disguises of interests.

To be sure, studies following the instrumentalist perspective do not insist that moral framing is necessarily self-regarding, amoral, or the sole basis of moral rhetoric.[100] Rationality, as they understand it, is merely taking proper means to any designated ends. In practice,

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[97] "Whatever else might motivate nations, argue Goldsmith and Posner, moral and legal rhetoric is at least "useful for purely amoral strategic interactions when cooperation and coordination are involved." Jack L. Goldsmith and Eric A. Posner, "International Relations : A Rational Choice Perspective," *The Journal of Legal Studies* 31, no. S1 (2002). See also Lyn Boyd-Judson, "Strategic Moral Diplomacy: Mandela, Qaddafi, and the Lockerbie Negotiations," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, no. 1 (2005); Michael J. Butler, *Selling a 'Just' War* (2012); David Chandler, "Rhetoric Without Responsibility: The Attraction of 'ethical' Foreign Policy," *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 5, no. 3 (2003); Jon W. Western, *Selling Intervention and War : The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public / Jon Western* (JHU Press, 2005).

[98] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 97–98; Karl Mannheim, Louis Worth, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1936).

[99] Mannheim, *Ideology, and Utopia,* 50.

[100] Rationalist models in IR typically assume that actors are purposive in that they use information about their environment to strategize toward their ranked preferences, yet leave those preferences as an open question. David A. Lake and Robert Powell, *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 6; John R. Oneal, "The Rationality of Decision Making During International Crises," *Polity* 20, no. 4 (1988), 601; Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies," *World Politics* 41, no. 02 (1989), 164. Some scholars even concede that political decision-makers consider the moral significance of their agendas, and that moral characteristics may be empirically important beyond their mercenary effects. James Perry and John W. Kingdon, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (1985), 4:132.

however, the effect of redefining moral concerns as inherently subjective preferences leads the positivist to avoid any meaningful attempt to evaluate the meaning, coherence, or merits of any moral argument.[101] This tendency is evident in IR's institutionalist literature, which considers state compliance with legal and moral obligations "a key puzzle in the study of international relations."[102] The typical "solution" to the puzzle is to redefine compliance as the calculation of costs and gains—even when the actors themselves define compliance as a moral obligation.[103]

The bet against an interpretation of moral opinion is not an arbitrary one. Such sidestepping is necessary because the focus of instrumentalism is not to evaluate any attitude or decision but to discover the factual relationship between the decision and designated aims. The instrumentalist believes it is not the role of the scientist to evaluate moral statements as expressions about objective truth and imperatives. After all, "there is no way in which the correctness of ethical propositions can be empirically or rationally tested."[104] Moral opinions

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[101] Herbert J. Storing, *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1962); H. Donald Forbes, "Positive Political Theory," 2004); Kertzer, "Microfoundations in International Relations."

[102] A. Burcu Bayram, "Due Deference: Cosmopolitan Social Identity and the Psychology of Legal Obligation in International Politics," *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017), S139.

[103] Some scholars in the institutionalist tradition not only take self-interest for granted, but demonstrate how apparent non-egoistic behavior is a predictable means by which rationally-designed institutions can achieve optimal results while minimizing the costs of cooperation. George W. Downs, David M. Rocke, and Peter N. Barsoom, "Is the Good News About Compliance Good News About Cooperation?," *International Law and International Relations* 50, no. 03 (2007); Goldsmith and Posner, "International Relations : A Rational Choice Perspective"; Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal, "The Rational Design of International Institutions," in *The Rational Design of International Institutions*, ed. Barbara Koremenos*, et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[104] Simon, "Administrative Behavior," 56.

are subjective, unfalsifiable constructs that must be analyzed "from a critical vantage point"—that is, as a source of power and legitimacy in the service of interests.[105] The instrumentalist bet is that black-boxing human behavior, making assumptions about human motivations, and focusing on the constraints represented by the strategic environment is a firmer basis for deriving testable, logically consistent predictions.[106]

In sum, the instrumentalist approach professes agnosticism toward human motivations while treating moral attitudes and opinions that accompany human behavior as either a means to (usually) fixed and self-serving ends, or otherwise necessarily subjective preferences whose substance and coherence are irrelevant to the researcher. By bracketing the vexing problems inherent in endogenous variables, especially moral beliefs, and instead testing how the changing conditions of a strategic environment affect individual and state interactions, these studies obtain generalizable conclusions that transcend the idiosyncrasies of any single sample. However, the advantages of the instrumentalist approach come at the cost of limit-

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[105] Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics* (SAGE, 2013), 394–399; see also Butler, *Selling a 'Just' War*, 15–16; Thrall, "A Bear in the Woods? Threat Framing and the Marketplace of Values," 459.
[106] Derek Beach, *Analyzing Foreign Policy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 103. Black-boxing human agency means decisions can be explained according to the variation in the strategic environment in which actors bargain and seek to maximize their utility. Some rationalists (though certainly not all) go so far as to argue that it is "not fruitful" to examine the truth or falsity of their assumptions about human behavior that serve as the premises of their far-reaching theories, since the presence of "internal logic" and "logical consistency" in hypothesis testing proves the appropriateness of those assumptions. Bueno de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics*, 394–397; see also Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. For a critique, see Stephen J. Majeski and David J. Sylvan, "Simple Choices and Complex Calculations: A Critique of the War Trap," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 28, no. 2 (1984), 325. Some IR theorists go so far as to argue that the deductive logic in a theory is the most important basis of choosing assumptions, and that other considerations are ultimately "a matter of taste or personal judgment." Bueno de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics*, 397.

ing the range of potential explanations. If opinions of right and wrong are rooted in ideology, then they are, by definition, false or dishonest opinions. If moral ideas are merely expressions of preferences that are neither true nor false, then they are unworthy of charitable evaluation in their own terms.[107] In either case, the instrumentalist approach forgoes serious examination of the substance of moral opinions, gambling away the possibility that moral opinions are coherent, meaningful articulations of the opinions that explain foreign-policy decisions.

Reductionism: Morality as Epiphenomena

As Herbert Simon put it in 1955, however reasonable the rationalist approximation of reality, there is a "complete lack of evidence that, in actual human choice situations of any complexity these computations can be, or are in fact, performed."[108] Over the last few decades, a growing group of behavioralists in IR have argued in favor of testing overt and expressed behavior of agents, arguing that the conveniences of the instrumentalist approach come at the cost of increasingly uncertain methodological bets about human motives.[109] Of-

[107] Leo Strauss, "Epilogue," in *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, ed. Herbert J. Storing (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1962), 324.
[108] Herbert A. Simon, "A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 69, no. 1 (1955), 104.
[109] Emilie M. Hafner-Burton*, et al.*, "The Behavioral Revolution and International Relations," *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017); Alex Mintz, "Behavioral IR as a Subfield of International Relations," *International Studies Review* 9, no. 1 (2007).

ten drawing on social-psychological theories, these critics argue that, despite professed agnosticism toward human motivations, rationalist inquiries are based on ontological assumptions about "microfoundations"—that is, "the elementary events" at the individual level, such as beliefs and their formations, before they manifest as a macro-level pattern.[110] Behavioralists argue that to not only predict patterns but also to explain events, scholars must open the black box of individual decision-making, and examine the extent to which actual human behavior conforms to rationalist assumptions.[111] What they will find is that preferences are not homogenous and that beliefs are not simply aberrations from rationalist expectations.[112] The promise of behavioralist IR is that by relaxing assumptions of rational decision-making models, it is possible to reach a more sophisticated and real-world understanding of human opinions and moral motivations.

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[110] Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (2015); Miles Kahler, "Rationality in International Relations," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998); Edward D. Mansfield and Diana C. Mutz, "Support for Free Trade: Self-Interest, Sociotropic Politics, and Out-Group Anxiety," *International Organization* 63, no. 3 (2009); Mintz, "Behavioral IR as a Subfield of International Relations"; Sungmin Rho and Michael Tomz, "Why Don't Trade Preferences Reflect Economic Self-Interest?," *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017).

[111] Christopher Gelpi, "Performing on Cue? The Formation of Public Opinion Toward War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 1 (2010); John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Hafner-Burton, *et al.*, "The Behavioral Revolution and International Relations"; Peter Hedstrom, Donald P. Green, and Ian Shapiro, *Contemporary Sociology Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science.* (Yale University Press, 1996); Joshua D. Kertzer and Brian C. Rathbun, "Fair is Fair: Social Preferences and Reciprocity in International Politics," *World Politics* 67, no. 4 (2015); Rose McDermott, "The Feeling of Rationality: The Meaning of Neuroscientific Advances for Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 04 (2004).

[112] Bayram, "Due Deference: Cosmopolitan Social Identity and the Psychology of Legal Obligation in International Politics"; Esra Cuhadar, *et al.*, "Personality or Role? Comparisons of Turkish Leaders Across Different Institutional Positions," *Political Psychology* 38, no. 1 (2017); Hafner-Burton, *et al.*, "The Behavioral Revolution and International Relations."

However, while some rationalist models approach moral opinions as the object of strategic manipulation through ideology, behavioralist IR tends to reduce moral opinions to epiphenomenal manifestations of psychological mechanisms that drive human behavior. By importing prepackaged theories from psychology and evolutionary biology, behavioralist studies often begin their inquiry by defining moral expressions as hedonistic mechanisms, such as avoiding "painful value tradeoffs" or seeking emotional gratification through vengefulness.[113] Everything from interstate war and ethnic conflict to nuclear proliferation and diplomatic outcomes is explained by classifying political beliefs as mechanisms of emotions.[114] According to Jonathan Mercer, "A belief in alien abduction is an emotional belief, but so is a belief that Iran intends to build nuclear weapons, that one's country is good, that a sales tax is unjust, or that French decision makers are irresolute."[115]

The tendency to redefine moral opinions as expressions of reflexive mechanisms is evident especially in IR research on identity.[116] Identity is a kind of priming mechanism that,

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[113] Donald R. Kinder, "Reason and Emotion in American Political Life," *Beliefs, reasoning, and decision making: Psycho-logic in honor of Bob Abelson* (1994); Peter Liberman and Linda J. Skitka, "Revenge in US Public Support for War Against Iraq," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2017); Lodge, Milton, and Charles S. Taber, "Three Steps Toward a Theory of Motivated Political Reasoning." In *Elements of Reason Cognition Choice and the Bounds of Rationality*, eds. Lupia, Arthur, and Mathew D. McCubbins. New York: Cambridge University Press (2000); Paul Saurette, "You Dissin Me? Humiliation and Post 9/11 Global Politics," *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 3 (2006).

[114] Jacques E.C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ifat Maoz*, et al.*, "Reactive Devaluation of an "Israeli" vs. "Palestinian" Peace Proposal," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 4 (2002).

[115] Jonathan Mercer, "Emotional Beliefs," *International organization* 64, no. 1 (2010), 1. See also Richard K. Herrmann, "How Attachments to the Nation Shape Beliefs About the World: A Theory of Motivated Reasoning," *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017).

[116] Cuhadar*, et al.*, "Personality or Role? Comparisons of Turkish Leaders Across Different Institutional Positions"; Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters* (Yale University Press, 2002); Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation:*

through an unconscious process of "self-stereotyping," helps individuals "cope" with dilemmas in a way that is consistent with the interest of their identifying group.[117] According to a recent study, seemingly coherent beliefs relating to national identity are driven by unconscious "internal emotional desires."[118] Even the radically non-egoistic "cosmopolitan social identity"—which one might assume exhorts individuals to subordinate self-interest to the global good—is based on an automatic, "psychological sense" of internalized norms that is elicited by "reflexive, rapid, and heuristic reasoning style."[119]

Behavioral IR, to its credit, has proven unsatisfied with imputing motives of self-interest when individuals express moralistic opinions. Much of the literature conveys the sense that human nature is intrinsically moralistic and judgmental. However, recent research on foreign-policy attitudes has also proven all-too-comfortable with reducing moral language to biologistic categories, such as those described in social intuitionist models.[120] These "pro-so-

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Identity, Emotions and Foreign Policy; Brett Silverstein, "Enemy Images the Psychology of U.S. Attitudes and Cognitions Regarding the Soviet Union," *American Psychologist* 44, no. 6 (1989); H Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (CUP Archive, 1981).

[117] Bayram, "Due Deference: Cosmopolitan Social Identity and the Psychology of Legal Obligation in International Politics"; Leonie Huddy, "From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory," *Political Psychology* 22, no. 1 (2001); Marilynn B Brewer, "Social Identity, Distinctiveness, and in-Group Homogeneity," *Social Cognition* 11, no. 1 (1993).

[118] Herrmann, "How Attachments to the Nation Shape Beliefs About the World: A Theory of Motivated Reasoning," S63.

[119] Bayram, "Due Deference: Cosmopolitan Social Identity and the Psychology of Legal Obligation in International Politics," S139, S143; Gerhard Reese, Amir Rosenmann, and Craig Mcgarty, "Globalisation and Global Concern: Developing a Social Psychology of Human Responses to Global Challenges," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 45, no. 7 (2015).

[120] Joshua D. Kertzer and Dustin Tingley, "Political Psychology in International Relations: Beyond the Paradigms," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 21 (2018); Kertzer and Rathbun, "Fair is Fair: Social Preferences and

cial" theories suggest that moral judgments are representations of ingrained cognitive modules—the reflexive, automatic, and predictable evolutionary responses that help individuals address social dilemmas and fulfill evolutionary social requirements.[121] As the social psychologist Jonathan Haidt explains, the appearance of heroism, altruism, and religious faith is ultimately a manifestation of "evolutionary adaptation" to socialize groups that are then absorbed as unchallengeable "narratives," blinding adherents to alternative moral worlds.[122] The upshot is that moral justifications that resemble deliberative reasoning by the public or foreign policy leaders are just "rationalizations"; what appears to be ethically-derived decisions and judgments are, in fact, rooted in *instinctual* foundations that help individuals "suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible."[123] In other words, these theories not only reject the notion that moral opinions deserve sympathetic evaluation but that doing so is highly deceiving. "[D]on't take people's moral arguments at face value," says Haidt. "They're mostly post hoc constructions made up on the fly, crafted to advance one or more

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Reciprocity in International Politics"; Herrmann, "How Attachments to the Nation Shape Beliefs About the World: A Theory of Motivated Reasoning."

[121] Jonathan Haidt, *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling the Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion* (Vintage, 1989); Jonathan Haidt, *Psychological Review the Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph, "Intuitive Ethics: How Innately Prepared Intuitions Generate Culturally Variable Virtues," *Daedalus* 133, no. 4 (2004); Jonathan Haidt, "Morality," *Perspectives on psychological science* 3, no. 1 (2008).

[122] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage, 2012), Chaps. 6–10.

[123] Haidt, "Morality," 70.; George Lakoff, "Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know That Liberals Don't," *Language* 74, no. 2 (1996); McDermott, "The Feeling of Rationality: The Meaning of Neuroscientific Advances for Political Science"; Kertzer and Rathbun, "Fair is Fair: Social Preferences and Reciprocity in International Politics."

strategic objectives."[124] By treating moral opinion as a byproduct of psychological mechanisms that are alien to the patent self-understanding of decision-makers, the reductionist perspective redefines the political as the biological, and dismisses (if not discourages) efforts to interpret moral opinions in their own terms.

In sum, the contributions of behavioralist IR to examining moral beliefs that arose from a rebellion of formalist orthodoxies have revealed their own self-imposed limitations. If the instrumentalist studies examine moral language in light of strategic and environmental constraints, reductionist studies examine moral language in light of biological, cognitive, and evolutionary constraints. Whereas instrumentalism employs a highly abstract rational man, reductionism employs a highly abstract biological man. In both cases, moral opinion is vacated of human agency, and therefore vacated of any interpretable substance or discursive coherence. Interpretation of moral arguments is deemed irrelevant (and even deceptive) because moral arguments are defined as post hoc, subjective rationales for an underlying interest or need (whether individual or collective, and whether material or psychological).

There is no denying that the literature on morality in IR has produced a considerable body of work that advances valuable questions. However, if behavioralists are correct that conclusions about moral beliefs must arise from careful observation rather than assumptions, then it is not obvious that the preconceived biological-psychological frameworks are the

[124] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion*, xxi.

most, or only, appropriate methods to interpreting agents' overt moral expressions.[125] The dominant approaches in IR do not examine morality in foreign policy so much as they classify it according to highly deterministic models that, however plausible and compelling, are not bound by their *subjects'* articulated arguments. The manipulation of moral phenomena to fit systematizing methods leaves out a whole class of voluntary motives that can be understood only through interpretation of moral language.

The Foundational Efforts to Tame the "Moral Force" in Foreign Policy

The evasion or rejection of moral agency is a methodological gamble that, normative IR theorists have long considered "a puzzling feature of much International Relations scholarship."[126] In this section, I argue that the tendency within IR to disfigure morality into mercenary and reductive concepts—a tendency so strong and pervasive that it rarely meets a justification—emerged from the polemical arguments of early realists, who founded the scientific study of foreign policy as it is known today. The importance of early realists such as Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr in setting "the paradigmatic boundaries of the discipline" is well known.[127] William Wohlforth concurs: "It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the

[125] In some ways, behavioralists are less suited than rationalists in interpreting moral arguments, as rationalists at least give their subjects the dignity of enjoying some capacity to perceive and rank priorities.
[126] Erskine, "Assumptions of Moral Agency in International Relations: Responsibility Misdirected and Obscured," 702. See also Mark Bevir and Oliver Daddow, "Interpreting Foreign Policy: National, Comparative and Regional Studies," *International Relations* 29, no. 3 (2015); Juliet Kaarbo, "A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory," *International Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (2015).
[127] Stefano Guzzini, Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold (Routledge, 2013), 27.

academic study of international relations is a debate about realism."[128] But what is often overlooked is that early realists set the *methodological* boundaries of the discipline. The realist founders of modern IR self-consciously sought to establish a science that inculcates an attitudinal aversion to the study of human intentions and substantive moral argumentation.

The realist science was a counter-educational campaign tailored to combat urgent political dangers facing Western democracies caused by a voluntarist notion of morality. As Morgenthau put it, "Dominant elements in Western Culture, and American culture in particular, have consistently misunderstood the nature of foreign policy and they have done so in the name of morality. In the process, our culture has deformed its understanding of morality and corrupted its moral judgment as well."[129] Early realists believed that an insistence on human malleability and an exaggerated notion of human agency had led Western intellectuals, leaders, and publics to seek peace through democratic reform and enlightenment. They argued that the tendency to study and shape motivations, a perennial one, is especially dangerous in the modern, industrial age of destructive weaponry. Responding to this challenge, realists called for "deliberate manipulation" of "the new moral force of nationalistic universalism."[130]

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[128] William C. Wohlforth, "Realism," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit, Duncan Snidal, eds. Oxford University Press, 2008), 131.
[129] Hans J. Morgenthau, "Introduction," in *Ethics and United States Foreign Policy Introduction* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), xv.
[130] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), 424, 584.

Since the dominant positivist studies remain in the shadows of classical realism, understanding the political nature of the methodological enterprise is fundamental to attaining clarity about its limits. For Brian C. Schmidt, "realism, in one form or another, survives and continues to provide what many would argue to be the initial essential assumptions for explaining international politics as it has been traditionally defined by the field of IR."[131] Precisely because early realists were so successful in establishing the parameters of inquiry, it is difficult to recognize what has become the passively accepted doctrines pervading the field. As Morgenthau himself observed, political scientists unaware of the ideas that produced their intellectual predispositions, and unwilling to critically detach from them, are unwittingly advancing someone else's agenda rather than understanding their subject matter.[132] If passive methodological prejudices originate in arguments, understanding and appraising those arguments are the vital first step to intellectual liberation and scientific advancement.

Classical realism was a reactionary intellectual movement that grounded its purpose and arguments against a cultural and political adversary it called idealism (and sometimes "utopianism," "liberalism," or "liberal internationalism").[133] During the twentieth-century interregnum, idealists pointed to the collapse of the European Concert and the devastation

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[131] Brian C. Schmidt, "On the History and Historiography of International Relations," *Handbook of international relations* 8 (2002), 21; see also Stephen M Walt, *The Enduring Relevance of the Realist Tradition* (WW Norton Company, 2002).

[132] Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (London: Latimer House Limited, 1947), 40–41.

[133] "For all that self-styled realists may complain about the dangers of idealism, cosmopolitanism or the misplaced domestic analogy, the tradition of political realism as we have come to know it is unthinkable without the priority ascribed to universalist claims within political theory." R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/outside: International Relations Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42.

of the First World War as evidence that the non-democratic, secretive diplomacy, emblematic of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European relations, was paving the future for perpetual interstate conflict.[134] Blinded by balance-of-power politics that has governed European relations since the Napoleonic Wars, Western leaders were contributing to a breakdown in collective security through their coercive and provocative pursuit of relative power. Idealists believed that war is pathological cruelty, the consequences of a man-made, self-fulfilling belief in international anarchy that leads to a costly breakdown in rational communication.[135]

Crucial to idealism was the voluntarist rejection of the idea that war is a tragic inevitability, whether of human insecurity or moral contestation. Idealists argued that human beings and political communities have the capacity and the obligation to sacrifice myopic convenience for long-term, global peace.[136] Since war is a misguided but correctable departure from civilization, what is most needed is "to deepen and strengthen the foundations of general education," wrote Alfred Zimmern, the first IR professor at Oxford University.[137] The

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[134] Jönsson, "Diplomacy, Bargaining and Negotiation."
[135] Guzzini, Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold, 17.
[136] The politics of nations was "a malleable thing that was capable of being patterned, albeit imperfectly, according to an effective moral order." Robert W McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 13.
[137] Alfred Zimmern, "The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918–1935," *International Affairs* 18, no. 2 (1939); Gilbert Murray, *The Ordeal of This Generation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1929).

hope was that education, combined with rationally designed institutions and mechanisms, would channel state behavior away from pyrrhic victories and toward perpetual peace.[138]

At the most fundamental level, realists of the 1930s and '40s shared idealist goals of global peace and security.[139] They also agreed with idealists that "political science is the science not only of what is, but of what ought to be," as Carr put it.[140] The disagreement was on the level of methods in defending Western liberty and security. Alarmed by the pervasiveness of idealist thought in diplomatic and elite culture of Western democracies, realists like Carr, Morgenthau, and George F. Kennan, argued that idealism was a form of crude moralization that was discredited by history's stubborn refusal to yield to even the most well-meaning sermons.[141] In *Scientific Man*, Morgenthau argued that twentieth-century idealism, in contrast to its earlier, liberal versions, is merely principled pacifism—"a self-defeating absurdity" that puritanically curtails state action even at the expense of the success of liberty.[142]

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[138] As Gilbert Murray put it in 1929, the post-WWI treaties that successfully banned war did not ban a human instinct but, like a repeal of a tax policy, amounted to a "political programme" directed at state action. Murray, *The Ordeal of This Generation*, 29.

[139] Morgenthau wrote that "the abolition of war is obviously the fundamental problem confronting international thought." Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 47; Carr, 3.

[140] Edward H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (Harper Collins, 1964), 4. According to Carr, the political scientist "is inspired by the desire to cure some ill of the body politic." See Carr, 3.

[141] Germany's rearmament, beginning soon after the First World War, revealed the failure of international organizations to marshal the will or capabilities to enforce effective sanctions. The failure of disarmament conferences (such as Geneva's in 1932–194) that sought to ban war demonstrated the futility of even the most high-profile multinational commitments. Law-breaking intervention by European powers, such as Italy's intervention in Ethiopia (1935), called into question the resilience of the most basic elements of supposedly self-enforcing mechanisms. Far from contributing to war, nineteenth-century power politics had constrained "the limitless desire for power" on the European continent. It was only once the Great War ended and the aristocratic moral codes in Europe was broken that nationalism, in its modern, Manichean form, was unleashed. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Chapter 13.

[142] Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, 66. See also Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Mainsprings of American Foreign Policy: The National Interest vs. Moral Abstractions," *American Political Science Review* 44,

While early realists conceded that moralism is a congenital fact of human life, they believed that its modern, democratic form is particularly dangerous. Idealists were foolishly advocating for democratic reform, arguing that, by broadening the constituency of political leaders, foreign policy would become more reasonable and less parochial.[143] Realists rejected this view, pointing out that the authoritative voice of mass opinion is fickle and, on matters of war and peace, prone to manipulation and easily beguiled by quixotic hopes.[144] In fact, the democratization of politics has only meant more efficient and rapid means "to mold and direct" the public will to belligerent state action.[145] What made democratic moralism especially dangerous, and why it was so urgent to counteract it, was the incidence of "modern technology," which "has made possible total war."[146]

Since the carnage of the century was made possible by the deadly recipe of democratic moralism and technology, prevention of future destruction demands that the science of foreign policy address one of the two ingredients—modern weaponry or democratic moralism. There was little question of what a more realistic goal was: "The effects of modern technology cannot be undone," wrote Morgenthau. "The only variable that remains subject to deliberate manipulation is the new moral force of nationalistic universalism."[147]

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no. 04 (1950); Bernard Williams, "Ethical Consistency," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

[143] Nicholas Murray Butler, *The Family of Nations: Its Need and Its Problems* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1938), 151.

[144] Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 32.

[145] Carr, 134.

[146] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 8, 26.

[147] Morgenthau, 584.

So powerful was this "new moral force" that the only way to manipulate it was to uproot its methodological voluntarism. "The utopian is necessarily voluntarist," wrote Carr. "He believes in the possibility of more or less radically rejecting reality, and substituting his utopia for it by an act of will."[148] The attraction and promise of Western democratic moralism relied on a profound sense of human freedom and mutability.[149] Moral crusaders must convince themselves that political relations—including international anarchy itself—are a function of human decisions and variable contingencies that need not perpetuate noxiously. Voluntarist notions of morality seduce people into a scientific study of human motives and the way in which education can reform and channel preferences to peaceful ends.

Realists argued that human motives are far too opaque and complicated to form the basis of any reliable science of applied ethics. As Morgenthau explained, examining motives "is futile because motives are the most illusive of psychological data, distorted as they are, frequently beyond recognition, by the interests and emotions of actor and observer alike. Do we really know what our own motives are? And what do we know of the motives of others?"[150] The examination of human motives leads to undue confidence and an exaggeration of the relationship between peace and good intentions. "History shows no exact and necessary correlation between the quality of motives and the quality of foreign policy."[151]

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[148] Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 11.
[149] Carr, 12.
[150] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5–6.
[151] Morgenthau, 6.

Realists like Carr and Morgenthau concluded that they must respond to idealism's purpose (the discovery and application of pacifying universal moral principles) by uprooting its methods (the inquiry and reformation of human intentions). "The new moral force of nationalistic universalism," as Morgenthau called it, must be tamed by a new science of international relations. This science, a "necessary corrective to exuberance of utopianism," would inculcate an "attitude" that treats political life as an epiphenomenal manifestation of underlying mechanistic causation, thus reforming human behavior by deprecating efforts to do so.[152]

In the first place, realists challenged the idealist insistence that there are discoverable and accessible universal moral truths. Following Reinhold Niebuhr, they argued that all human knowledge is "finite knowledge, gained from a particular perspective."[153] Applied to international relations, the lesson is that "there are no internationally accepted standards of morality," as Kennan put it.[154] Circumstantial and material differences among states means that "universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states."[155] The idealist disguises the human fact of "divergent interests." These divergent interests, based on the material inequality of nations, meant that it is "a dangerous illusion to suppose that this hypothetical world community possesses the unity and coherence of communities of more limited

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[152] Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 9–10.
[153] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation: Human Nature* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1953), 194; George F Kennan, "Morality and Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 64, no. 2 (1985), 215.
[154] Kennan, "Morality and Foreign Policy," 207.
[155] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 10-11.

size up to and include the state."[156] However seemingly sacrificial and altruistic, moral ideas are artificial constructs emanating from some particular power dynamic in a social order:

> The realist cannot logically accept any standard value save that of fact. In his view, the absolute standard of the utopian is conditioned and dictated by the social order, and is therefore political. Morality can only be relative, not universal. Ethics must be interpreted in terms of politics; and the search for an ethical norm outside politics is doomed to frustration.[157]

The realist science must unveil apparently earnest, philanthropic, or spiritual opinions as the parochial, materialistic concerns of certain individuals and groups.[158] In other words, moral rhetoric and opinions must be interpreted as ideology—as "primarily…a vehicle of power," or "transparent disguises of selfish vested interests."[159] As Morgenthau explained, human beings use "ideological concealments, rationalizations, and justifications of necessity" to cover over the "moral deficiency" inherent in the underlying aspiration for power that pervades human behavior.[160] It follows that immorality is merely the socially constructed stigma one ascribes to the individual aspirations for power.[161] In reality, the needs of the political "have no

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[156] Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 162.
[157] Carr, 21.
[158] According to Carr, "What matters is that these supposedly absolute and universal principles were not principles at all, but the unconscious reflections of national policy based on a particular interpretation of national interest at a particular time." Carr, 87. The earnestness of moral justifications, noted Kennan, can be taken as *evidence* of underlying, amoral, self-interested intentions: "It is a sad feature of the human predicament, in personal as well as in public life, that whenever one has the agreeable sensation of being impressively moral, one probably is not." Kennan, "Morality and Foreign Policy," 213.
[159] Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 173, 88.; McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy*, 24. As Morgenthau approvingly repeats from Karl Mannheim: "The study of ideologies has made it its task to unmask the more or less conscious deceptions and disguises of human interest groups, particularly those of political parties." Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 101.
[160] Morgenthau, "Introduction," xvii.
[161] Just as domestic moral principles are the product of "a dominant group" in a society speaking in the name of the common good, international moral principles are "the product of dominant nations or groups of nations," coated in a veneer of philanthropy. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 79.

moral quality," wrote Kennan.[162] What states need "are the unavoidable necessities of a national existence" which are "not subject to classification as either 'good' or bad.' They may be questions from a detached philosophic point of view. But the government of the sovereign state cannot make such judgments."[163] According to Morgenthau, the only "objective" category that is universally valid is the "concept of interest defined as power."[164] Similarly, Carr argued that "the exposure of the real basis of the professedly abstract principles commonly invoked in international politics is the most damning and most convincing part of the realist indictment of utopianism."[165]

By distinguishing between the hard, amoral facts of material interests and the moral, mythical (or "constructed") moral principles, realists established a science that not only avoids substantive questions of moral judgment but explicitly denies their scientific relevance:

> Any rational approach to foreign policy requires the assumption that there exists a national interest as an objective datum, by which thought and action can orient themselves. Without that assumption, we could not speak of truth with regard to matters of foreign policy but only of opinion. People would take a stand according to their individual preferences, and there would be no possibility of distinguishing between correct and false opinion. One man's opinion would be as good as the next one's, and power to make one opinion prevail over the others in the contest of the marketplace would be the only applicable criterion.[166]

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[162] Kennan, "Morality and Foreign Policy," 206.
[163] Kennan, 206.
[164] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 10. As Morgenthau argues, this does not mean that interests are pursued in the same way across all conditions because states' objectives change according to their political and cultural environment.
[165] Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 87.
[166] Morgenthau, quoted in W. David Clinton, *The Two Faces of National Interest* (LSU Press, 1994), 21. See also Kaarbo, "A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory," 204; Carr,

Establishing a deterministic science that (in Morgenthau's words) "guards" against concern with motives and ethics means distinguishing between the factual nature of interests and the subjective, socially and materially contingent nature of morality.[167] The realist science demanded on an explicit division between ethics, which "in the abstract judges the moral qualities of motives," and politics, which judges the value-neutral qualities of "intellect, will, and action."[168] The deterministic approach teaches that "there is little room for meaningful choice on the part of state decisions makers, and even less room for the choice of moral values that conflict with the national interest."[169]

The practical effect of the division interests and ethics was designed to provide "rational principles of sound foreign policy," bringing greater coherence and understanding to what would otherwise appear to be circumstantial motives, preferences, and the moral and intellectual qualities of statesmen.[170] As Morgenthau explained, "The concept of interest defined as power imposes intellectual discipline upon the observer, infuses rational order into

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Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939, 12; Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Restoration of American Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1962), 199.

[167] In so doing, realists succeeded in creating a field that is deeply self-conscious about its empirical rigor and independence. Stanley Hoffmann, *The Political Ethics of International Relations* (Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 1988), 8.

[168] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6. Also, see Carr: "In the field of thought, [realism] places its emphasis on the acceptance of facts and on the analysis of their causes and consequences. It tends to depreciate the role of purpose and to maintain, explicitly or implicitly, that the function of thinking is to study a sequence of events which it is powerless to influence or to alter." Politically, realism "tends to emphasise the irresistible strength of existing forces and the inevitable character of existing tendencies, and to insist that the highest wisdom lies in accepting, and adapting oneself to, these forces and these tendencies. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 10.

[169] McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy*, 3.

[170] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960-70* (1970), 44. Whereas conventional moralism in democracies inevitably results in hypocritical, unprincipled, and vain foreign policy, realist rationalism stands above the democratic fray and is best positioned to be effective, honest, and morally principled—yet

the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible."[171] Statesmen and citizens could then become more comfortable with their self-love and keep straight a distinction between the duty of advancing national interest and the mere "personal wish" of realizing moral values.[172] "Scientific analysis has the urgent task of pruning down national objectives to the measure of available resources to make their pursuit compatible with national survival."[173]

In developing a division between the "empirical" and "normative" sides of IR, the realist project has enjoyed a legacy that transcends classical realism. No less than the "first-image" realists of whom it disapproves, Waltz's neorealism is motivated to combat idealist efforts to trace war and peace to human behavior because such modes of thought contributes to deadly conflict.[174] Indeed, Waltz parts ways with classical realism because he believes it is not sufficiently categorical in rejecting human mutability.[175] If classical realists sought to educate, with arguments, that claims of justice are constructs of their context, neorealism has

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avoiding feckless or destructive moral pretensions. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 89; Kennan, "Morality and Foreign Policy," 215, 217.

[171] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5.

[172] Morgenthau, 7.

[173] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1971), 224.

[174] Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, 113. Waltz's political aims are evident from (quite literally) the first page of *Man, the State, and War*, where he describes the peaceful aims of social science in taming idealism. See also pp. 113–114, 233–237. Similarly, Christopher Layne warns against turning international politics into "a morality play," and that foreign policy "must be driven by considerations of interest and security, not idealism and sentimentality." Christopher Layne, "A Tragedy, But Not Worth a War for Europe or the United States," *Toronto Star*, August 9, 1992, A12; and Christopher Layne, "If People Are Going to Die, They Should Not Be Americans," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1995, B7.

[175] Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, 27–30, 80–81.

been so thoroughly educated that it no longer attempts to make the argument.[176] Accordingly, neorealism also takes for granted that the most urgent task of IR is to circumscribe the scope of foreign policy to "a narrow calculation of state interests."[177] Today, even empiricists who have no "realist" labels are prone to dismissing moral controversies as the realm of idle philosophic traditions that "lacked modern tools of analysis (which we, luckily, have at our disposal)" to examine empirical reality.[178]

The legacy of realism in international relations as a whole is well-known to normative-theory scholars, who have criticized early realists for dogmatically dismissing the empirical relevance of moral judgment and human agency.[179] However, such criticism misses a crucial point: the purpose of the realist science was not necessarily aimed at establishing a more

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[176] For example, Waltz accepts Morgenthau et. al.'s conclusion that justice has no objective definition but (unlike his predecessors) does not provide the reasoning that led him to it. For Waltz, it seems that the fact that justice can (and is) invoked by different states is sufficient proof that it "cannot be objectively defined." See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 201. See also *Man, the State, and War*, 113–114, 190.

[177] Although Waltz's later work, *Theory of International Politics*, was a self-described theory of international relations and not foreign policy, even there he betrays a clear concern for encouraging similarly limited foreign policy aims. He repeatedly describes certain power arrangements as "better" or "best" based on whether they produce more peaceful outcomes for large powers like the United States. See *Theory of International Politics*, especially chapters 3 and 4. Waltz also expresses "the dangers" of "humane rhetoric" embodying good intentions, and the often "foolish" succumbing to temptations in American foreign policy. See *Theory of International Politics*, 201; see also 110, where Waltz notes the problems with relying on intelligence and goodwill, further revealing his theory's political agenda. On this point, see Michael C. Desch, "It is kind to be cruel: the humanity of American Realism," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 3 (2003), 420. As Desch points out, Waltz's seemingly austere theory about international-system constraints grapples with pressing political matters of statesmanship.

[178] Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, 14.

[179] One line of argument suggests that, despite the obvious relevance of moral judgment, realists insist that "moral judgments have no place in discussions of international affairs or foreign policy." Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, 15. According to Jack Donnelly, realists "regularly, sometimes spectacularly, overstate the nature and significance of the 'facts that constrain the pursuit of moral objectives in [international] politics." Jack Donnelly, *The Ethics of Realism* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 153. On this point, see also Allen Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law* (OUP Oxford, 2003), 29; Duncan Bell, "Political Realism and International Relations," *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 2 (2017); McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy*, 19.

rigorous empirical standard for studying foreign policy. Rather, it was aimed to free a certain mode of decision-making from what they believed to be the powerful and misguided moralism of the day. To paraphrase A.J.P. Taylor, if the idealists of the twentieth century fought just wars and killed millions, the realists sought to improve the situation by teaching the world to fight necessary wars that killed thousands.[180] In fact, early realists conceded that their science was at least in part a tendentious obfuscation of reality—an attitude based on half-truths meant to oppose "the moral impulses" of Western society that were endangering prudent statecraft.[181] It is no exaggeration to say that the deterministic sterility of IR and its hostility to charitable examination of moral opinions is itself a moral projected with political

[180] Quoted in Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, 114.

[181] For Carr, the ultra-deterministic quality of realism made it a scientific caricature, a self-avowed enemy of subtleties concerning human motives—but one necessary to combat reigning moralism. "*The* exposure by realist criticism of the hollowness of the utopian edifice is the first task of the political thinker. It is only when the sham has been demolished that there can be any hope of raising a more solid structure in its place (Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 89.). Yet "The impossibility of being a consistent and thorough-going realist is one of the most certain and most curious lessons of political science" (Carr, 6). As a political tool, realism is effective. As a science, Carr said, realism fails to stand on its own because its own weapons would turn against it. It relies on the assumption that modes of thought are materially and circumstantially conditioned, and yet excuses itself as the single exception. Realists recognized that foreign policy is necessarily a complex mix of motives, of "conscience and power," and that morality plays a powerful source in foreign policy (Carr, 100.). Morgenthau stressed that political science "must adapt its emphasis to the ever changing circumstances of the times. When the times tend to depreciate the element of power, it must stress its importance" (Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 47). For similar reasons, Morgenthau praised efforts to illuminate "the moral implications of political action" when it exerts "a beneficial effect" on the conduct of foreign policy. (Morgenthau, "Introduction," xix.). "Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action," wrote Morgenthau. Precisely for that reason, the science aims to effectively "obfuscate" moral demands in political action so as to make it easier to "gloss over" any tension between the urgent security goals and any complicating moral requirements (Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 12.). See also Kennan, "Morality and Foreign Policy," 206.

objectives. Realists believed that, by founding a field of study that is habitually averse to entering the realm of moral judgment and decision, they could educate their fellows in such a way as to encourage "rational principles of sound foreign policy."[182]

Conclusion

At the heart of normative theory in IR is a distinction between moral principles and selfish interests, a discernment between high and low motives, and the capacity of individuals act according to rules of conduct irreducible to the compulsions of necessity and desire. Such an understanding of self-command and agency is absent in the dominant positivist approaches in IR, which default to deterministic explanations of moral opinions. Unlike normative theories, which assume that statesmen can and do consider the moral basis of their international actions, much of positivist research suggests that "statesmen are inclined to give moral norms secondary consideration in making policy decisions or to use morality expediently."[183] Rather than assess the meaning and significance of moral questions, these empirical approaches redefine moral opinion as either the instrumental means to some fixed (and usually selfish) ends, or otherwise reduce them to unconscious, biological determinants. Meanwhile, scholars inclined toward "normative" questions have puzzled over their exclusion in empirical studies.

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[182] Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 224.
[183] Levi, "The Relative Irrelevance of Moral Norms in International Politics," 197.

However, as we have seen, the orthodoxies underlying the deterministic commitments were born from political, rather than scientific, necessities. Like social science more generally, modern IR theory began as an attempt to contribute to society's progressing demands of peaceful well-being by transforming politics into an emotionally and morally neutral technical art.[184] At the heart of the empirical approach is the desire "to substitute rational decisions for…snap judgments," or a "normative" desire to devise methods to supplant random instances of "good" or "bad" policy with systematic observations and standards.[185] Similarly, the founders of modern IR sought to destroy the false hopes generated by notions of human reform and make policy on the sturdier and more disciplined foundation of self-interest. To that end, they encouraged a political orientation with a scientific varnish that eschews open inquiry of human motivations—one that distinguishes between "factual" determinants and the "wishes" of morality, and methodically positions voluntarist notions of moral concerns as irrelevant, if not inconsistent with, empirical inquiry.

There is a paradox in the success of the realists in reprobating the voluntarist study of foreign policy in order to reform foreign policy thinking. By convincing IR's practitioners that they are perched at a "critical vantage point" from which they can analyze foreign policy, the field has become enmeshed in passively held, deeply rooted assumptions about human

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[184] Brian Fay, *Social Theory and Political Practice (Routledge Library Editions Social Theory)* (Routledge, 2014).
[185] Clarence E. Ridley and Herbert A. Simon, "The Criterion of Efficiency," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 199, no. 1 (1938), 20. See also Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decision-Making in Foreign Policy* (Westview Press, 1980); Nicholson, "The Continued Significance of Positivism," 141.

motivations that go unchallenged. These assumptions obscure what early realists recognized was the very real, all-too-real, moral force in foreign policy.

Chapter 2: Interpreting the Moral Basis of Foreign Policy

The positivist imperative of following a rigorous protocol that subsumes morality in interests and needs has provoked alternative empirical approaches that privilege thoughts and ideas over material conditions and forces. The constructivist and psycho-attitudinal perspectives argue that human behavior is inseparable from some combination of subjective, socially-developed ideas. Both perspectives have served as a powerful corrective to the highly materialistic inertia in the study of international relations. However, both perspectives also point to a need for an interpretive approach that considers the articulated intentions of the decision-makers under investigation. By carefully and charitably analyzing the arguments and justifications of political leaders, an intentional analysis could help generate more grounded explanations of American foreign-policy decisions.

Few historical periods better demonstrate the virtue of an intentional analysis than late nineteenth-century American foreign policy. Beginning especially in the 1930s, scholars have attributed the shift from America's tradition of isolation to global predominance as a function of strategic and cultural determinants playing out independently of the articulated moral arguments uttered by Grover Cleveland and William McKinley, the two presidents constitutionally responsible for the regime's foreign policy at the time.

TAKING IDEAS SERIOUSLY

The constructivist and the psycho-attitudinal approaches have ably challenged the positivist tradition that tends to reduce behavior to fixed interests or environmental constraints. Both, however, point to a need for an interpretive method.

Constructivism rejects the notion that interest (including "the national interest") is an objective and fixed concept, emphasizing the role of identities, discourses, and ideas in foreign policy.[186] Constructivists argue that interests are shaped by subjectively-defined norms that may not conform to a static definition of well-being.[187] Because they reject the rigid ontologies of the "materialist" perspectives, constructivists are open to questions relating to moral beliefs.[188] Indeed, some constructivists argue that global cultural norms may trump domestic state interests in foreign policy.[189] However, constructivists tend to avoid charitable analysis of moral opinions, instead privileging structural (as opposed to agent-

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[186] The constructivist premise is that "we must reconstruct the world through the eyes of actors to understand their behavior." Richard Ned Lebow, *National Identities and International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 2. See also Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Cornell University Press, 1996).
[187] Judith Goldstein, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Cornell University Press, 1993), 4; Kaarbo, "A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory."
[188] As Martha Finnemore argues, "a social constructivist approach to politics allows us to make sense of principled concerns, morality, and individual action." Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*, 87. Finnemore points out that it is important, for example, to examine leaders' public justifications as evidence of operative norms. See Finnemore, 158.
[189] Martha Finnemore, "Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention," in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 156.

based) explanations.[190] The result is that many constructivists treat norms as uniform, ethereal forces that "function as constraints or even as determinants of political behaviour."[191] When constructivists do pay attention to foreign policy decision-makers, they typically do so with an "oversocialized" view of agents, as though individuals are mere "cultural dupes," or passive transmitters of ideas into policy.[192]

In contrast, attitudinal and personality theories are deeply concerned with how individuals interpret moral ideas and how these ideas shape their behavior.[193] These theories rest their hypotheses on particular "belief systems," "operational codes," or "role conceptions" to

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[190] For example, see Finnemore's effort to develop "a systemic approach to understanding states interests and behavior by investigation an international structure, not of power, but of meaning and social value." Finnemore, 2. See also David M. McCourt, "Role-Playing and Identity Affirmation in International Politics: Britain's Reinvasion of the Falklands, 1982," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 4 (2011); K. Schonberg, *Constructing 21st Century U.S. Foreign Policy: Identity, Ideology, and America's World Role in a New Era* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 8; Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory Constructivism I N International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (2013); Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*; Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*.; William Flanik, "Bringing FPA Back Home": Cognition, Constructivism, and Conceptual Metaphor," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, no. 4 (2011), 9.

[191] Mark Bevir, Oliver Daddow, and Ian Hall, "Introduction: Interpreting British Foreign Policy," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 15, no. 2 (2012), 3. In this regard, the challenge for constructivism is revealed in its name: according to constructivists, an idea is a "construct" that has no discernible meaning beyond what emanates from an intersubjective process known as "socialization." Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 4, no. 1 (2001), 392.

[192] Michael Barnett, "Culture, Strategy and Foreign Policy Change: Israel's Road to Oslo," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 1 (1999), 7. As a recent study put it, "There are surprisingly few attempts to explore either the increasing messiness of policy making or the diverse actors involved with their varying beliefs and desires. The focus remains on reified capacities and structures or on the 'operational codes' or psychologies of leaders." (Bevir, Daddow, and Hall, "Introduction: Interpreting British Foreign Policy," 3.) The empirically grounded simplifications that help scientists operationalize and test complex concepts also makes it difficult to interpret the details in their subject. Forbes, "Positive Political Theory"; Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*.

[193] Alexander L. George, "The "operational Code": A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1969); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2017); Deborah Welch Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton University Press, 1985).

formulate causal links between individual behavior and personality dispositions or existential worldviews.[194] According to these theories, decision-makers need not follow the cost-benefit rationality of formalized models; actors may comply with habits, identities, or heuristics that result in rationally confounding behavior.[195] However, in their effort to generate parsimonious explanations with generalizable inference, the psycho-attitudinal perspectives have run into familiar limitations.[196] Like constructivists' socialized beliefs, the psycho-attitudinal "images" or "lenses" are independent constraints that are developed by the researcher rather than the subject under study.[197] The "truth" of any leaders' words is irrelevant because "the objective situation" is necessarily filtered through subjective "values."[198] For example, according to one study, "Elites primarily seek support not by appeal to truth but through appeals to values

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[194] Ole Holsti, "Cognitive Process Approaches to Decision-Making: Foreign Policy Actors Viewed Psychologically," *American Behavioral Scientist* 20, no. 1 (1976), 18–19.

[195] Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decisionmaking: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Longman, 1971); Mintz, "Behavioral IR as a Subfield of International Relations."

[196] Ole Holsti, "A Typology of 'Operational Code' Belief Systems," *Decision-making research: Some recent developments, ed. Daniel Heradstveit* (1977).

[197] Raymond A. Bauer, "Problems of Perception and the Relations Between the United States and the Soviet Union," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 5 (1961); Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of Foreign Policy: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Cornell University Press, 2002); Ole Holsti, "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study (1962)," in *Making American Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Agents under study are merely middlemen between outcomes and mental models. Many psycho-attitudinal follow the behavioral approach's tendency to source motives to involuntary reflexes and compulsions. See, for example, Sheldon Stryker and Anne Statham, "Symbolic Interaction and Role Theory," in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Gardner Lindzey and Aronson. Elliot (New York: Random House, 1985).

[198] For example: "[A] worldview is required before one can even determine which facts about a potential threat are the relevant facts." And: "Framing theory acknowledges…the centrality of values, the fact that we cannot interpret reality in a purely objective way but instead much choose a perspective from which to view it, and the fact that our opinions flow from the frames we use to interpret the world." A. Trevor Thrall, "A Bear in the Woods? Threat Framing and the Marketplace of Values," *Security Studies* 16, no. 3 (2007), 463, 467.

couched in statements that gain their strength from unfalsifiable visions of the good society."[199] The success of "framing," or promotion of a viewpoint, is preordained according to the preexisting worldview of the audience.[200] Here ideology is not necessarily imprisoned by interests (as it is for the instrumentalist perspective) but is imprisoned by some cognitive "structure"—whether belonging to an individual mind, a group, or an entire epoch.[201] Not surprisingly, these top-down theories typically forego substantive analysis of opinions, and even historical context, instead employing some combination of terse exegesis, term-aggregation, and content classification, sometimes conducted by language-mining computer software.[202]

In sum, the constructivist and psycho-attitudinal approaches reject many of the methodological commitments of positivist approaches. They have demonstrated the virtue of broadening inquiry into behavior that is not entirely constituted by material constraints and interests. However, these approaches also mimic the formal sciences in their highly abstract, reified interpretive narrowness. They prime their subjects with established sociological or

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[199] "People hold opinions and support political elites not because they make truer claims than others but because those claims resonate more deeply with people's value systems, beliefs, and cherished identities." A. Trevor Thrall, "A Bear in the Woods? Threat Framing and the Marketplace of Values," *Security Studies* 16, no. 3 (2007), 457. See also Ted Brader, *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds: How Emotional Appeals in Political Ads Work* (University of Chicago Press, 2006); George E Marcus*, et al.*, *Feeling Politics the Measure and Mismeasure of Emotion* (Springer, 2006), 31-45.

[200] Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm." *Journal of communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58.

[201] Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 49–50.

[202] K. E Boulding, "National Images and International Systems," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 3, no. 2 (1959); Holsti, "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study (1962)."

psychological ascriptions, damning their subjects' arguments as false representations of reality, rather than proceed from a bottom-up, interpretive analysis of moral opinions. Ironically, then, these approaches lead to methods that convey little curiosity about the argumentative meaning of the ideas and beliefs at the center of their research.[203] This has left an opening to scholars who are more tolerant of liminal, non-axiomatic explanations.[204] As one study explains, "the rise of constructivism, critical theory and poststructuralism in foreign policy analysis has thus led to the use of interpretive methods but not…to a thoroughgoing interpretive approach."[205]

THE INTERPRETIVE APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY

An interpretive approach is "an account of the reasons for or meanings of social action."[206] For a specific political action to be intelligible, or meaningful, we must understand

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[203] Originating as it does in post-positivist skepticism about whether any observer can transcend a self-enclosed context, constructivists view norms and ideas as "myths" or "narratives" that are necessarily subjective. See Jim George and David Campbell, "Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1990).

[204] Constructivists are often criticized for discussing theory but not demonstrating their "comparative advantage in explaining real-world events." Ngaire Woods, "Economic Ideas and International Relations: Beyond Rational Neglect," *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1995), 61.

[205] Bevir, Daddow, and Hall, "Introduction: Interpreting British Foreign Policy," 4.

[206] John Ferejohn, "Structure and ideology: change in Parliament in early Stuart England," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change* (1993), 228. More generally, interpretation and "thick description" are often associated with early protests against the formalism of positive social sciences. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* 3 (1973); Charles Taylor, *Explorations in Phenomenology Interpretation and the Sciences of Man* (Springer Netherlands, 1973). Charles Zug, "Could Political Science Become Diagnostic? Restoring a Forgotten Method." *Perspectives on Political Science* (2017): 1-8.

not only the conditions that gave it rise, but also its rationalization.[207] We can have comprehensive knowledge of the physical laws that makes a window break with a thrown rock and yet not understand why an individual decided to throw it.[208] As John Ferejohn explains, "We want to know not only what caused the agent to perform some act but also the agent's reasons for taking the action."[209] It is not sufficient to explain an action by saying it appealed to the actor; interpretation means assessing the actor's rationalization to explain what it was about the action that made it appealing.[210] As Jeffrey Tulis explains (in the context of studies on the American presidency), the interpretive approach "is more a search for meaning than for causes, more a concern for significance than for laws, more a quest for coherence than for certainty."[211] The open-ended nature of interpretive analysis permits the researcher to emphasize the purposive character of individual actions without any antecedent assumptions about intentions or pre-packaged, axiomatic theories of human behavior. The subject is given the opportunity to explain himself—what politics means to him, what are the reasons for his preferences, and why he takes certain actions.

Typically, positivists view interpretation as important, but insufficient, for generating causal inferences. They argue that, to truly understand why a political actor did something,

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[207] Harry Eckstein, "Case study and theory in political science," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds. *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 1, *Political Science: Scope and Theory* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 81.
[208] Donald Davidson, "Actions, reasons, and causes." *The journal of philosophy* 60, no. 23 (1963).
[209] Ferejohn, "Structure and ideology: change in Parliament in early Stuart England," 228.
[210] Donald Davidson, "Actions, reasons, and causes." *The journal of philosophy* 60, no. 23 (1963): 685-700.
[211] Jeffrey K. Tulis, "The Interpretable Presidency," in *The Presidency and the Political System*, ed. Michael Nelson CQ Press, 1987), 47.

the interpreter must abide by strict procedures (relating to such considerations as sample size and variance) that can transform "a mass of facts" into "specified values," or simplified representations that can be measured systematically (whether qualitatively or quantitatively) and establish non-idiosyncratic, "abstract" relationships.[212] In this view, absent any attempt to find *generic* effects from observed data, or the effect of some variable(s) on some other variable(s) across stipulated conditions, interpretation is limited to historical narration of unique events.[213]

It is undoubtedly true that the interpretive approach cannot reduce an action to an effect of some exogenous, causal regularity—to do so is to reject the very meaning of a voluntary, purposeful action. An interpreter cannot simultaneously treat seriously an individual's self-articulated *reasons for action* while also attributing those same reasons to determinants that *acted upon* the individual. However, despite the limits of interpretation to establishing *generic* causal inferences (that is, the establishment of patterns and regularities across cases), the interpretive approach can do more than merely "describe" or "narrate" subjects' rationalizations. By analyzing an actor's reasons for actions, we can uncover the actor's intentions. For "to know a primary reason why someone acted as he did is to know an intention with which the action was done."[214] That intention, in turn, can be said to represent at least an

[212] King, Keohane, and Verba, 42–43; see also 16.
[213] Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton University Press, 1994).
[214] Davidson, 689.

instance of a general phenomenon. Thus, by accepting the possibility of voluntary, non-deluded action, the interpretive approach is in the business of causal inference insofar as it treats the actor's specific *intentions* as causes of action. Such an "intentional analysis" interprets rationalizations, subordinating the search of generic causal regularities to specific descriptions of purpose, in order to build toward an understanding of how an action followed from an individual's (or institution's) intentions. As Donald Forbes explains:

> [J]ust as rational choice theory can be positive and theoretical without being causal in the standard sense, so too can the analysis (or interpretation) of the purposes actually pursued by individuals, groups, and political communities. Its rules of procedure may be less easily codified than those for statistical analysis or formal modelling; its criteria of success or failure may be less clear; its assumptions about human motivation may be far less parsimonious than the gross simplifications associated with 'rational choice', but intentional analysis is nonetheless directed to answering factual questions of a theoretical character. It is not just disguised moralizing or devious prescribing—or at least no more so than the currently more reputable forms of positive theorizing. And its descriptions, like theirs, are not just collections of brute facts: they are revealing abstractions from or interpretations of the facts, showing a certain distinctive detachment from practice.[215]

An intentional analysis abstracts and theorizes only as far as is necessary to understand reasons or rationalizations. That means it keeps intact political and moral opinions as complex statements of purpose, rather than "surface expressions" conditioned by an inescapable schematic structure (such as the economist's notion of a market, the neorealist's notion of an international system, or the constructivist's notion of a reigning ideology).[216] Standing at a remove from his subject, a researcher may be inclined to treat his subject's reasons for action as

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[215] Forbes, "Positive Political Theory," 66.

[216] Geertz is writing in the context of anthropological analysis of cultures. See Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 17.

mere opinions, personal values, or an expression of an inescapable cultural situation. But if an actor expresses his moral opinions as causally meaningful—as the truest principles compelling him to do right and avoid wrong—then the analyst of intentions must try, at least as a first step, to try to understand what, according to the actor, are these moral reasons and how they inform his action. This charitable allowance is its own sort of methodological bet, of course, but it is an essential one for the researcher who aims to find out how, or whether, an actor's moral reasons are related to his policy decisions.

In no way does the privileging of agency over "structure" trivialize the importance of a broader "context." Nor does it preclude the importance of exogenous factors beyond the agent's control. On the contrary, focusing on specific claims and rationalizations means that the interpretive approach is uniquely suited to understanding the environment of its subjects. By allowing the subject to explain the extent to which the environment influences his actions, the interpreter is better able to undertake an iterative, grounded analysis of the reasons for action and establish what is (or is not) important about the context.[217] For "to understand an individual's behaviour, we must know how he perceives the situation, the obstacles

[217] As anthropologist Clifford Geertz explains: "Interpretive explanation—and it is a form of explanation, not just exalted glossography—trains its attention on what institutions, actions, images, utterances, events, customs, all the usual objects of social-scientific interest, mean to those whose institutions, actions, customs, and so on they are." Geertz stresses that scientific knowledge is more expansive than implied by formalized methodology: "The reconfiguration of social theory represents, or will if it continues, a sea change in our notion not so much of what knowledge is but of what it is we want to know. Social events do have causes and social institutions effects; but it just may be that the road to discovering what we assert in asserting this lies less through postulating forces and measuring them than through noting expressions and inspecting them." Clifford Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," *The American Scholar* 49, no. 2 (1980), 178.

he believed he had to face, the alternatives he saw opening up to him."[218] In other words, context is indeed important, but the interpreter does not begin by assuming that the subject's statements and actions are simply conditioned or determined by the context; to do so would leave no basis for separating intentions from the context.[219]

The interpretive approach is not without its challenges. To derive meaning from the subject, the interpreter must often formulate conclusions based on contradictory, incoherent, and incomplete materials.[220] Moreover, a sustained commitment to derive meaning from language means that the interpreter is always susceptible to exaggerating the significance of data to the research questions. As argued in the previous chapter, much of IR theory casts doubts on the earnestness of rhetoric on the (not unreasonable) argument that individuals make decisions for reasons that may have nothing to do with their stated justifications.[221] Whereas positivists methods typically bracket any attempt to distinguish between sincere and insincere rhetoric, the interpreter is inclined to take on the burden, despite the absence of any accepted standard for such adjudication. Alternatively, some positivists point out that leaders may "frame" foreign policy decisions in moral terms, whether to delude others or

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[218] Quoted in Jacques Hamel, Stéphane Dufour, and Dominic Fortin, *Case study methods*. (Sage, 1993), 17.
[219] As Donald Davidson explains, "Talk of patterns and contexts does not answer the question of how reasons explain actions, since the relevant pattern or context contains both reason and action." Davidson, 692.
[220] Lebow, *National Identities and International Relations*, Chapter 2.
[221] Richard Ned Lebow, *Constructing Cause in International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), Chapter 4; Daryl J. Bem, "Self-Perception Theory," *Advances in experimental social psychology* 6 (1972).

themselves, and that there is no logical relation between motivations and attached statements.[222] Whereas the rigorous positivist draws a precise map to his destination, the free-wheeling interpreter paints an impressionistic landscape inspired by his own creativity—unbound by the universally valid rules of research design.[223] Then there is the problem at the other end of the magnifying glass: can the interpreter truly be said to access his subject's "reality" without distorting the picture by his own contextually-conditioned, jaundiced lens? According to one line of arguments (common among positivist as well as critical theorists and postmodernists), there is no escaping one's perspective, and it is "impossible" to expect of the researcher "disinterested analysis," or to have the capacity "to know the underlying truth of the situation."[224]

These challenges to the interpretive approach illuminate its limitations but also its unique virtues.[225] First, that data is not unambiguous is a universal feature of all empirical methods; no data is relevant without interpretation by the researcher. What is important is whether, and how, the researcher justifies an interpretation.[226] As argued in Chapter 1, much

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[222] See, for example, Ryan Goodman, "Humanitarian Intervention and Pretexts of War," *The American Journal of International Law* 100, no. 107 (2006). See also the psycho-attitudinal literature cited above.
[223] This view may be encouraged by the segment of interpretivism that stresses epistemological skepticism. Colin Hay, "Interpreting Interpretivism Interpreting Interpretations: The New Hermeneutics of Public Administration," *Public Administration* 89 (2011). Indeed, many of the touted advantages of the positivist approaches outlined above (such as their parsimony, stylistic categorization, linear and reproducible procedures, and so on) can be turned into critiques of the much more free-styling methods of interpretivists. Goldstein, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, 27. See also Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 36–43, 75–76.
[224] See A. Trevor Thrall, "A Bear in the Woods? Threat Framing and the Marketplace of Values," 467–468.
[225] Stephen G. Salkever, *Finding the Mean: Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 113.
[226] Berns, "Voting Studies," 38.

of the research on morality in IR consists of imputing motives—not because of any detailed interpretation, or because the assumptions are so obviously true, or because the researcher has succeeded in transcending his own context—but because of the researcher's decisions about what is methodologically convenient.[227] Thus, despite its name, the interpretive approach does not differ from other methods purely because of its use of interpretation. Rather, it is distinguished by its attempt to provide a defense of its interpretation through a sustained analysis of the reasons and arguments given for actions. These actions may indeed seem fickle and contradictory; their reasons may exhibit ignorance, confusion, and intellectual deficiencies; perhaps, even, a researcher's critical, aerial perspective can more accurately surmise the true intentions of the studied agent than the agent himself. Nevertheless, an intentional analysis presumes that, before drawing such conclusions, it is worth finding out what the subjects did and the reasons they provided for their actions.[228] This kind of political analysis tolerates language that is not perfectly clear or unambiguous, recognizing that such complexity "corresponds to the complexity of political life."[229] The analyst assumes that human beings carry with them faculties to make decisions and to articulate coherent reasons (however flawed) for them.[230] It leaves open the possibility of a distinction between desire and choice, and that

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[227] Bueno de Mesquita, *Principles of International Politics*, 397.
[228] Alan Finlayson, "From beliefs to arguments: Interpretive methodology and rhetorical political analysis." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2007), 545-563.
[229] Strauss, "Epilogue," 321.
[230] Walter Berns, "Voting Studies," in *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, ed. Herbert J. Storing (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1962), 41.

moral justifications, even if they help a leader attain amoral desires, are not necessarily comprehensive explanations for a leader's choice.[231] Finally, such an intentional analysis leaves open the possibility that individuals do not merely have "preferences" but also preference-shaping and preference-prioritizing moral principles. These are principles that do not (or do not merely) act upon individuals through socialization. They are principles that individuals may affirmatively hold, understand, and attempt to explain.[232]

Such a mode of inquiry—one that attempts to "rethink the thoughts" of the subject—is unavailable to the researcher whose primary purpose is to discover abstract causal regularities.[233] In contrast to positivist orthodoxies of causal analysis, the probative value of an intentional analysis does not depend on excluding the possibility that political opinions are earnest and thoughtful.[234] As one scholar explains, "no nomological inquiry—no search for the causal patterns that may have led up to the action—can do justice to this purposeful character of human action, since it cannot tell us about the meaning of the action to the individual who performed it."[235]

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[231] Strauss, 325.
[232] Strauss, 318.
[233] Lee C. McIntrye, *Laws and Explanation in the Social Sciences* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1996), 124–125.
[234] Berns, "Voting Studies," 43.
[235] McIntrye, 125.

INTERPRETING THE STRATEGIC SHIFT: 1893–1901

The present study undertakes an intentional analysis of Cleveland's second term and McKinley's first term during the pivotal, waning years of the Gilded Age.[236] This study uses case studies because intentional analysis, as described above, depends on a careful and detailed examination of how individuals understand their situation and their priorities. In the spirit of the intentional analysis just described, the case studies are meant to demonstrate the relevance of analyzing the opinions and arguments of the presidents to apprehend how *they* understood the purpose of their decisions and policies.[237] With each president, I focus on the foreign policy challenges that provoked the most controversy, since these are also the challenges that provoked the most extended justifications and self-reflection. I undertake an original analysis of the President's private and public policy justifications. I trace the President's decisions using a variety of primary sources, especially public addresses, private correspondence, and diplomatic memos that convey the presidents' directives.[238]

The Gilded Age, and in particular the 1890s, has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate. Recent historical works have cast doubt on the era's reputation as a period of

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[236] The Gilded Age is traditionally confined to the 1870s and '80s, but, more recently, has been expanded to include McKinley's presidency.

[237] Although this study does not strive for generalizable and causal achievement, it does recognize the importance of qualitative case-study analysis as an essential method to dig into relevant historical details and the potential of such inquiry to provide the basis of subsequent theoretical development applicable beyond the cases. Alexander L. George, and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 109.

[238] Occasionally, I supplement this analysis with secondary literature. However, since much of the literature fails to concentrate efforts on interpreting the President's intentions, my analysis is meant to distinguish between various explanations.

highly corrupt interest-driven politics and cynical mass manipulation. Not unlike the 1780s, the 1890s is now regarded as a period of an unusual degree of political deliberation in which participants "debated real issues, grappled with genuine problems, and sought workable solutions."[239] This was "a time of intense conflict between old values and the pressures generated by massive change," supported by contests over national identity and statecraft with great consequences—politically, culturally, and militarily.[240] The period represents a moment of great flux and contention over America's foreign obligations and national identity—a moment when the needs and expectations of extensive arguments were heightened.[241]

In foreign policy, the legacy of the 1890s is widely regarded as the pivot from strategic, aloof isolation to expansive hegemony.[242] As George Herring put it, "During that tumultuous decade, the pace of diplomatic activity quickened. Americans took greater notice of events abroad and more vigorously asserted themselves in defense of perceived interests."[243] The United States, for the first time, was acquiring overseas territory without any intention of statehood incorporation. It culminated with the defeat of Spain, the control of Cuba,

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[239] Gould, quoted in Richard E. Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland* (University Press of Kansas, 1988), 3.
[240] Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), xiii. For a contrasting perspective, see Leopold (1962) who argues that the period reflects a continuous progression rather than any break in national self-understanding.
[241] Trubowitz 1992, 175
[242] "[T]he 1890s were a watershed, a time when America redefined its grand strategy, replacing decades of passivity and self-isolation with a new and dynamic diplomacy of expansion in the Western Hemisphere and Pacific Basin. What is much less clear is, why?" Peter Trubowitz, "The Bush Administration and the Future of Transatlantic Relations," *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas* 80 (2001), 4.
[243] George C Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 299.

Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. It was a moment when the United States abandoned its confined continental hegemony and strategy of geostrategic aloofness. Samuel Flagg Bemis famously called the change "the great aberration."[244]

Not long after McKinley's assassination in 1901, historians began reflecting on the legacy of the period and offering several reasons for America's strategic shift from continental to global power. What emerged were three alternative (though sometimes intertwined) schools of thought, sourcing the change to motives of profit, security, and cultural ideas.

According to the profit-centered school, the foreign policy of the period was driven by a combination of economic trends, such as the surplus of goods in a saturated domestic market, growing industry punctuated by economic upheavals, and the desire and economic need to attain access to new foreign markets.[245] Charles Beard argued that, by 1895, "American economic interests in Cuba were strong enough to induce interference. Slavery was gone, but capital, still more dominant, had taken its place."[246] The new foreign policy reflected "the frank acknowledgment of the new emphasis on world policy which economic interests demanded."[247] More recently, Walter LaFeber has traced the rise of the United States as a global power to a centralization of politics and military strength, which itself was driven by

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[244] Samuel Flagg Bemis, "The Great Aberration of 1898 (1936)," in *American Imperialism in 1898*, ed. Theodore P. Greene (Boston: Heath, 1955).
[245] "The war of 1898 was not just a glitch in the histories of Spain, Cuba, the Philippines, China and the United States but part of their domestic developments and their response to the economic crisis of the 1890s." Thomas D. Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization* (2013), 102.
[246] Charles A. Beard, *Contemporary American History, 1877-1913* (Macmillan, 1921), 204.
[247] Beard, 204. In their *The Rise of American Civilization*, Charles and Mary Beard argue that foreign policy was largely dominated by economic issues and business interests. See also Charles A. Beard, and Mary R Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: MacMillan, 1927), Vol II, 170–177.

the expanding needs of corporate capitalism in a cycle of domestic centralization and foreign expansion.[248] The movement of the U.S. economy comprised of agrarian production to a more urbanized, dynamic, industrial, and globalized market compelled political officials to protect commercial interests by securing existing foreign claims and finding new ones.[249]

These profit-centered accounts typically work backward, drawing inferences of motives from the outcomes of foreign policy (i.e., commercial expansion). The historian Thomas D. Schoonover demonstrates succinctly how such inferences are typically drawn: "U.S. action in the Gulf-Caribbean and Pacific basins had responded to the depression of the 1890s. After the war of 1898, the U.S. economy experienced a boost in Asian and Caribbean trade."[250] As the political scientist Richard F. Hamilton has shown, explanations that point to colonial markets as fields of new investments draw most of their evidence not from the lips of the era's politicians (or even business moguls) but from other historians, journalists, and politicians who were rarely involved in actual policy-making.[251] Hamilton summarizes these "progressive" narratives by noting that "Political leaders, the elected and appointed officials figure prominently in those accounts but they are assigned less importance, being

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[248] Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Cornell University Press, 1963).
[249] Walter A McDougall, *The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy: How America's Civil Religion Betrayed the National Interest* (Yale University Press, 2016), Chapter 11; Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895–1902* (Monthly Review Press, 1972), 282–310; William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 27–57; LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*.
[250] Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization*, 99.
[251] Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1936).

treated typically as little more than 'agents' of the business leaders."[252] Meanwhile, one strains to find in these studies any sustained or charitable analysis of the great mass of moral justifications provided by the presidents of the time.

When they do not ignore the prevalence of moral rhetoric, the profit-centered explanations situate moral arguments in the context of a reigning "ideology." The theological and nationalistic ideas elucidated by the prominent theologians, intellectuals, and strategists are said to be "more a rationale for, than a cause of, American expansionism."[253] The politicians of the decade are sometimes described as canny manipulators of a gullible public that desperately needed some kind of moral crutch to justify their raw pursuit of profit and domestic stability.[254] In his influential histories, William Appleton Williams claims that Gilded Age politicians wielded moral arguments to reinforce "hard-headed economic requirements."[255] Similarly, Michael H. Hunt argues that "Ideology was functional, a tool used by the grandees of American capitalism to maintain their economic power and with it their sociopolitical control."[256] When a gap seems to emerge between the moral rhetoric and the conduct of

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[252] Richard F. Hamilton, *America's New Empire* (Routledge, 2017), 1.

[253] Walter LaFeber, "Comments," *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (1978), 669. LaFeber is referring here to Social Darwinism. As his analysis of Josiah Strong, Alfred Mahan, and John Fiske indicate, their central contribution to the climate of the time was their emphasis on demographic and economic determinants. LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, chapter 2.

[254] Williams argues that the ruling elite was deeply insecure about chaos and revolution resulting from labor unrest and corporatism. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 21.

[255] Williams, 64.

[256] Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 9. See also Gerald E Markowitz, "Progressivism and Imperialism: A Return to First Principles," *Historian* 37, no. 2 (1975). As David Pletcher has argued in a critique of these works, many politicians of the period spoke of foreign markets without taking actions to attain them. His lesson seems to be that we should be wary of reading too much into rhetoric. David M. Pletcher, "Rhetoric and Results: A Pragmatic View of American Economic Expansionism, 1865–1898," *Diplomatic History* 5, no. 2 (1981). A more painstaking analysis of Cleveland and McKinley

U.S. policy, some scholars dismiss the language as a transparently hypocritical cover for economic motives, rather than provide a charitable account of the arguments and available alternative explanations.[257]

Other scholarship on the period focuses on the security motivations that drove American expansion. On its face, the Gilded Age was a period of uncharacteristic peace and presents an interesting quandary for the realist belief in the primacy of security.[258] During this period, Great Britain was in relative decline, Germany was in relative ascent, and the United States was enjoying relative peace an ocean away from most controversies. Mired in their dependencies in Africa and Asia, European powers had little interest in confronting an increasingly powerful hemispheric hegemon.[259] Addressing America's strategic shift, realist explanations of different flavors have pointed to the increasing capability of the United States government and the security imperative to block major competitors that threatened encroachment into the hemisphere.[260]

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can be found in John A.S. Grenville and George Berkeley Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy*, 1873–1917 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

[257] See, for example, Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization,* chapter 6.

[258] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*; Trubowitz, Goldman, and Rhodes, The Politics of Strategic Adjustment: Ideas, Institutions, and Interests.

[259] Indeed, the greatest threat the United States faced *vis-à-vis* great power during the Gilded Age was a European pact with a state in the Western Hemisphere which could obstruct America's regional security. John J Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 236, 249.

[260] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. Similarly, Ernest May suggests that Cleveland and McKinley were largely concerned with their domestic agenda and that it was the international context that forced them to pursue a new course. Ernest May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961).

Like the profit-centered explanations, the security-centered theories either ignore moral arguments or simply reduce them to instrumental rationalizations that fed the underlying security needs of the nation. For John Mearsheimer, what is important to emphasize on this score is that ideational factors "did not contradict the security imperative."[261] Indeed, the presence of moralism during this period is *corroboration* that a "proper mask" was needed to cover over the "brutal politics" that made possible America's expansion.[262]

While this realist explanation imputes motives without considering what was actually said at the time, an older realist account, found in George F. Kennan's seminal *American Diplomacy, 1900–1950,* acknowledges that evidence of security motivations is, alas, largely absent in the debates at the time. Kennan thus does not assume that leaders were operating according to hidden security motivations. However, his highly polemical critique leads him, without evidence, to conflate the moral considerations of the leadership with ill-defined but overwhelming emotional fever that encompassed much of the public. Kennan's account is one of many that relies on assumptions about "popular moods," "emotional complexes," and the prevalence of ill-considered "legalistic ideas."[263] McKinley, Kennan concludes, resorted to war with Spain for "subjective and emotional reasons" untethered to any prudent, security-minded understanding of the national interest.[264]

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[261] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*, 250.
[262] Mearsheimer, 250.
[263] Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900–1950*, 22, 49, 87.
[264] Kennan, 22. The apparently obvious insensibility of the foreign policy *vis-à-vis* security concerns has fed even more forthright diagnoses, such as Richard Hofstadter's claim that the United States suffered from a "psychic crisis." Hofstadter, "Manifest Destiny and the Philippines."

Other scholars, among them constructivists, have provided more persuasive assessments of the role of ideas during the Gilded Age. According to Edward Rhodes, the decade marks "a reconstruction of the cultural and cognitive landscape, not necessarily a response to change in the physical or political one."[265] Following the Civil War, a heightened sense of nationalism and imperialism took hold of American society. The most powerful leaders of the time were driven by new ideas—relating to religious destiny, racial hierarchy, and political legitimacy—that were propagated by the likes of naval strategist Alfred Mahan, clergyman Josiah Strong, historian John Fiske, and political scientist John Burgess.[266] The naval enlargement that culminated in America's strategic shift was part of a broader, cultural revolution in American identity and purpose spurred on by political reformers like Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, Secretary of State John Hay, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, and Senator Albert J. Beveridge.[267] A yellow press overseen by propaganda outlets, including Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, put these ideas into the public imagination.[268]

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[265] Edward Rhodes, "Constructing Power: Cultural Transformation and Strategic Adjustment in the 1890s," in *The Politics of Strategic Adjustment: Ideas, Institutions, and Interests* 1999), 29.
[266] James W. Ceaser, "The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism," *American Political Thought*, no. 1 (2012); Paul T. McCartney, *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (LSU Press, 2006); David Bell Mislan, *Enemies of the American Way: Identity and Presidential Foreign Policymaking* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2012); Rhodes, "Constructing Power: Cultural Transformation and Strategic Adjustment in the 1890s."
[267] Robert Dallek, *The American Style of Foreign Policy: Cultural Politics and Foreign Affairs* (Random House Inc, 1983); Robert L O'Connell, *Sacred Vessels: The Cult of the Battleship and the Rise of the US Navy* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 1991), 69.
[268] Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands*, 22 ff.

Most of these constructivist and ideology-oriented accounts privilege structure over agency. They speak of ideas as independent forces that compel or constrain leaders.[269] In such depictions, rhetoric matters little because it was used merely to reinforce shared ideas—an effort to draw "on values and concerns widely shared and easily understood by its audience."[270] Moral arguments, in other words, are important only insofar as they are effective tools to persuade the public, or reveal a shared identity that the President himself has adopted.[271] Most of the work of these theories proceeds according to the determinants of ideas (such as Social Darwinism and racial hierarchy) that rationalize expansionism, rather than the specific elaboration or explanation of individuals.[272] Ultimately, studies on ideas and ideology are compelling insofar they describe a structural-ideational context. But they have less to say about what leaders actually said and what these leaders meant.[273]

In a sense, downplaying the importance of Gilded Age statesmen is understandable. The period is sometimes regarded as a time when presidents were mired in domestic discord to the exclusion of foreign policy. Herring quotes the British academic James Bryce (1838–

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[269] The reliance on vague notions of public opinion and *zeitgeist* is not without critics. Hamilton has argued, persuasively, that much of the evidence for public moods is nonexistent. Richard F. Hamilton, *President McKinley, War and Empire* (Routledge, 2006); Hamilton, *America's New Empire*.

[270] Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 15.

[271] Some scholars point out that leaders channel policy by deliberately invoking certain traditions of republicanism. See, for example, Daniel G. Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic: The Law of Nations and the Balance of Power* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 109. For a more compelling study, see Mislan, *Enemies of the American Way: Identity and Presidential Foreign Policymaking*.

[272] Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 36–37.

[273] As Hamilton has argued, "in most progressive accounts, America's 'masses' are said to be manipulated, complicit, in one way or another 'moved' to support those aggressive initiatives." Hamilton, *America's New Empire*, 123.

1922) as observing that "the President has rarely leisure to give close or continuous attention to foreign policy."[274] However, Herring does not mention that Bryce himself recognized that the executive power maintained "an unfettered initiative, by means of which he may embroil the country abroad or excite passion at home," and that initiative, in matters of war, "expands with portentous speed."[275] The 1890s represent a moment when presidents vigorously exercised these constitutional powers to facilitate and shape public debate over the nation's character, its global fate, and what moral responsibilities pair with its increasing power. The deterministic narratives treat moral language as a rationalization for profit- and security-centered objectives, or as manifestations of an inescapable cultural matrix. They have little to say about the intentions of the presidents as revealed by their own privately- and publicly-articulated explanations. The purpose of the case studies in the following chapters is to fill this gap, while demonstrating the unique advantage of an intentional analysis to understanding American foreign policy decision-making.

Conclusion

The constructivist and psycho-attitudinal critique in IR has illuminated the limitations of materialist approaches and the empirical importance of interpreting norms and ideas. However, both have remained wedded to the positivist tendency to attribute moral

[274] Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, 277.
[275] James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (New York: MacMillan, 1928), 54.

opinions to determinants that act *upon* decision-makers.[276] By training the researcher's attention to the meaning of agents' actions as they understand them, an intentional analysis can open a range of moral motivations that are effectively closed off by deterministic theories.

The purpose of the following case studies is to demonstrate the comparative advantages of an intentional analysis. The extant literature on waning years of the Gilded Age betrays a remarkable gap between the importance ascribed to the period and the attention paid to how political leaders understood and justified their decisions. Most of the prominent explanations infer from outcome to cause, beginning with the fact of America's global strategic and economic ascendancy at the beginning of the twentieth century, and then tailoring their analysis of the antecedent period to fit that outcome. As I argue in the following chapters, this outcome-driven, deterministic approach has led some scholars to simply ignore the contrast in McKinley and Cleveland's foreign policies and treat the period as a kind of secular providence by which "structural" forces gradually and inexorably culminate in unprecedented and world-historic expansionism. As we shall see, the differences between the presidents are sometimes acknowledged. Yet these differences are reconciled only by a strained interpretation that situate Cleveland's tenure in the beginning of an inexorable movement toward global outreach that became fully manifest during McKinley's presidency.

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[276] Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, 13; David Patrick Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3, no. 1 (2007).

Chapter 3: The Communitarianism of Grover Cleveland

Glancing at the titles of Grover Cleveland's sympathetic biographies—*A Study in Courage* (1932), *A Study in Character* (2000), *An Honest President* (2000), *The Forgotten Conservative* (2013)—one quickly ascertains that this was a man known for his concern for personal probity, civic virtue, and traditional political formalities.[277] Early in his New York career as Mayor of Buffalo (1882) and Governor (1883–1885), he cultivated an image of fearless political integrity, presenting himself as an enemy of corrupt electoral politics and government waste. When the journalist Joseph Pulitzer endorsed Cleveland's bid for president in 1884, he provided four reasons: "1. He is an honest man. 2. He is an honest man. 3. He is an honest man. 4. He is an honest man."[278] When his political enemies accused him of having a child out of wedlock, Cleveland publicly conceded the possibility, voluntarily provided child support, and dissipated the controversy.[279] Whatever his shortcomings, Cleveland strived to serve as an exemplar of the common patriotic citizen—sensible, accessible, free of intellectual pretensions, and attentive to the public interest. At the same time, Cleveland was, as Richard E. Welch put it, "a tangle of self-contradictions: humble and ambitious, courageous and cautious, practical and moralistic, irritable and kindly, aggressive and sensitive."[280]

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[277] Alyn Brodsky, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Character* (Truman Talley Books, 2000); H Paul Jeffers, and Raymond Todd, *An Honest President* (Blackstone Audio, Incorporated, 2012); Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage* (Dodd, Mead, 1962); John Pafford, *The Forgotten Conservative: Rediscovering Grover Cleveland* (Regnery Publishing, 2013). Even his less sympathetic biographies make the point: R.G. Tugwell, *A Biography of a President Whose Uncompromising Honesty and Integrity Failed America in a Time of Crisis* (New York: MacMillan, 1968).

[278] S.D. Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: Third Edition* (NYU Press, 1993), 262.

[279] Brodsky, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Character*, 89–90.

[280] Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, 17.

As his published post-presidency lectures addresses suggest, Cleveland was deeply interested in elucidating the necessary virtuous requirements of sound democratic character while holding up his example as worthy of emulation. He was, as one early biographer said, "immoderately modest"—someone who sought to be an extraordinary model of ordinary virtue.[281]

Cleveland's pride in personal and political rectitude is evident in his domestic agenda. A Bourbon Democrat, and the only Democratic president between 1861 and 1913, he was a proponent of free trade and interstate commerce. His enthusiasm for free markets, however, was tempered by his deep suspicion of the political influence of big business and special interests.[282] He constantly sought to exercise his commitment to government efficiency and accountability, even when doing so won him little popularity.[283]

Cleveland's concern with domestic reform should not be confused with intellectual disinterest or policy passivity in matters of foreign policy. While he respected the need and propriety of legislative deliberation on every major foreign policy issue facing him, he also demonstrated a firm commitment to protecting and exercising the prerogatives of his office. He did not hesitate to interject in congressional deliberations, forcing legislators to change course and take up new issues. When he felt it was necessary to maximize his discretion and

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[281] Jesse Lynch Williams, *Mr. Cleveland: A Personal Impression [1909]* (Cornell University Library, 2009), 10.
[282] Cleveland's main priorities were domestic and economic (tariffs and hard currency in monetary policy), although he was not unsuccessful in seeing these priorities into legislation. He appealed to his South-dominant base for his Jacksonian wariness of congressional excess and the concentration of corporate power.
[283] He vetoed a total of 584 bills, including veterans' pensions. *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to Congress,* SAGE Publications, 2012, 804.

execute his foreign policy agenda, he forcefully asserted his constitutional authority over lawmakers' protests and threats.

That agenda has not vexed scholars as much as it should. On one hand, Cleveland is regarded as the last gasp of America's commitment to traditional neutrality and national contentment with its "splendid isolation." Indeed, Cleveland's responses to the few international controversies of his first term (1885–1889) were largely consistent with his inaugural promise to continue Washington and Monroe's policy of "independence" and "neutrality," avoiding "foreign broils" while repelling great powers from hemispheric encroachment.[284] After losing office to Benjamin Harrison and winning it again four years later, Cleveland returned to the White House (in March of 1893) under a party platform that promised in foreign policy much of what he gave the country in the first term—a strong national defense, backed by a strong navy, and the maintenance of a diplomacy that cultivates friendships, especially with Latin neighbors, while avoiding entangling alliances.[285] However, Cleveland's second term (1893–1897) was much more eventful. During this period, foreign controversies became domestic issues. The President was deeply involved in international affairs and sometimes

[284] He withdrew from senatorial consideration the Frelinghuysen-Zavala Treaty, which gave the United States the right to build a trans-isthmian canal in Nicaragua. He also threatened Germany when it tried to interfere in Samoan politics, and sought to diplomatically settle intricate legal issues relating to fighting rights off Newfoundland, boundary disputes between Alaska and British Columbia, and over British sealers operating in the Bering Sea.

[285] "Democratic Party Platform of 1892 (the American Presidency Project)." http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29585; "Democratic Party Platform of 1884(the American Presidency Project)." http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29583.

seemed to stray from his reputation as a non-interventionist, and from the putative isolationist inertia of the era.

Most scholarship on Cleveland's foreign policy makes little effort to understand his conveyed understanding of his intentions. The overriding lesson of much of the literature is that Cleveland's foreign policy intentions are insignificant—that his personal inclinations were contained within an immotile political car inexorably moving on tracks prepared for him by domestic and international forces. His preferences made no practical difference, we are told, since his foreign policy was merely continuing his predecessor's, and preparing the ground for his successor's expansionism. "His personal and his party's isolationist inclinations could not impede the structural pressures that demanded the United States take a more active role in world affairs," says Fareed Zakaria.[286]

Needless to say, Cleveland himself did not view his stated objectives and justifications as epiphenomenal expressions of, or futile resistance to, a disembodied expansionist providence. This chapter considers Cleveland's moral arguments as he understood them—that is, in light of the circumstances and considerations he said were most important to shaping his foreign policy. To that end, this chapter analyzes the three international episodes of his second term that invited the most public controversy and self-reflection by Cleveland: His attempted reversal of ongoing plans for Hawaii's annexation, his interposition into the border dispute between Great Britain and Venezuela, and his decision to maintain a policy of

[286] Zakaria, 154.

neutrality as Cubans revolted against their Spanish masters.[287] What emerges from this interpretation, I argue, is a strikingly lucid and fairly consistent articulation of a national interest guided by an overriding concern with certain communitarian principles of international justice.

THE ANNEXATION OF HAWAII (1893–1895)

Cleveland's decision to thwart the treaty to annex the Hawaiian islands is regarded by his biographer, Allan Nevins, as among the most important, yet neglected, episodes in American diplomatic history—furnishing "the first great debate in American history over the merits of imperialism."[288] For supporters of annexation, Cleveland's decision to reverse his predecessor's policy was bizarre—a gratuitous political recrimination that sided with an anti-American, corrupt, anachronistic monarchy. As Robert N. McElroy wrote in his 1923 biography of Cleveland, "It would have been easy, had he been fitted with a less exacting conscience, for President Cleveland to go smoothly on to its culmination."[289] Cleveland chose to

[287] Although Cleveland did not write a biography or keep a diary, he spoke and wrote extensively following his presidency. He published several of his Princeton University, including *The Self-Made Man in American Life* (1897) and *Presidential Problems* (1898). Most of the descriptions of his own operations while in office suggest much of the speeches and messages were a product of his own reflections and revisions rather than speechwriters or ministers. See Richard Watson Gilder, *Grover Cleveland: A Record of Friendship* (Century Company, 1910), 44; Robert McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923); Nick Cleaver, *Grover Cleveland's New Foreign Policy: Arbitration, Neutrality, and the Dawn of American Empire* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014).
[288] Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, 549.
[289] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 45.

depart from the easy route and take an uncompromising stand that, in his view, would protect the independence of a helpless nation against the contemptible actions of an aggressor—that is, his own country. In part because the debate over Hawaii annexation was so polarizing, and because so much seemed at stake to both sides, it helps shed light on the moral reasoning of a president who prided himself in avoiding meddlesome international controversy.[290]

The Context

Cleveland's refusal to connive at the annexation of Hawaii is all the more striking given the apparent inevitability of American control of the Hawaiian islands, not only from the perspective of a historian's hindsight, but also among the nineteenth-century political elite, who witnessed the island's rapid transformation into a protected American colony.[291] Since the days of John Quincy Adams, the islands were regarded as of utmost importance to America's long-term geostrategic interests. By the 1820s, the navy routinely dispatched its ships to collect debts owed to American traders by Polynesian chiefs. Over the following decades, ties deepened as New England Congregationalist made native Hawaiian society one of their primary targets of spiritual reform. Meanwhile, the archipelago turned into a major economic partner of American sugar planters and whalers. In 1842, John Tyler declared that

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[290] Brodsky, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Character*, 297.

[291] As McElroy put it: "From the beginning of our contact with the Hawaiian Islands, many Americans had felt that control by the United States, perhaps annexation, was inevitable." McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 46.

the United States would not accept any foreign acquisition of the islands. Three years later, the Reciprocity Treaty consummated the relationship and the United States gained complete access to the kingdom's sugar market while formally prohibiting the island from any foreign control.

As independence of the Sandwich Islands was approaching purely nominal status and the crown became a symbolic shell, the process of peaceful integration was interrupted abruptly. In 1891, a native monarch, Queen Liliuokalani, came to power on a nationalist platform to restore the kingdom to its historic majesty. Rejecting the constitutional designed foisted on her late brother's kingdom by a white establishment, she declared war on the liberal elements of her constitution. Hawaii's modernity came at the cost of surrendering the kingdom to foreigners who have little stake in Hawaiian heritage, she argued. The "downtown party"—the mercantile element embodied by the Chamber of Commerce, the sugar planters, and missionaries—were wielding disproportionate influence on the kingdom's crown, which she regarded as "the sole guaranty of our nationality."[292] On January 14, 1893, in the name of her indigenous constituents, she purged her cabinet of dissenters and promised the constitutional disenfranchisement of the foreign white elite.

Interpreting the queen's actions as an abdication of the regime's constitutional authority and sensing an opportunity to thwart the queen's designs, the *haole* (white), mostly

[292] Queen Liliuokalani, *Hawaii's Story By Hawaii's Queen* (Tuttle Publishing, 2011), chapter 29. At the time, much of the Hawaiian economy was dominated by first-, second-, or third-generation descendants of American merchants and missionaries. See Hamilton, *America's New Empire*, 65 ff.

American elite of Oahu, comprised of pro-annexationist politicians, lawyers, and businessmen, began a revolution against Hawaiian royalty. Once she sensed danger was afoot, the queen attempted to recant her program. This would come too late: Undoubtedly sympathetic to the revolutionary cause, John Stevens, President Harrison's minister to Hawaii, dispatched American marines of the USS *Boston* (which happened to be stationed off Honolulu at the time) to help the revolutionary leaders force the queen out of power and to set up a provisional government in her place.[293] Stevens then declared the Provisional Government the presumptive ruling entity under a U.S. protectorate, and the 1,600-year-old kingdom was effectively dead. In February, President Harrison sent a treaty of annexation to the Senate, but his term expired before Congress could conclude deliberation of the treaty that would see these provisions into law. In the weeks following the revolution, a debate emerged, with some questioning whether Hawaii was stolen or whether annexation was worth the political and military risks.[294]

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[293] Stevens' actions were premised on the dubious claim that American lives and property were in imminent danger. But, as Cleveland would later point out, it was no secret that Stevens had harbored resentment of the Hawaiian nobility and long believed that the islands should become the exclusive possession of the American continent. McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 51.

[294] Carl Schurz, *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz, Vol 5* (GP Putnam's Son, 1913), 203. The anti-imperialist Carl Schurz would later suggest that popular approval would have secured annexation immediately were it not for a Republican press that, in seeking to champion the party and Harrison, publicized the matter in such a way as to unwittingly provoke a broader debate. Carl Schurz, "Manifest Destiny (Harper's Magazine)," in *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz, Vol 5*, ed. Frederic Bancroft GP Putnam's Son, 1913).

In general, however, attitudes were quite favorable to annexation. As the *New York Tribune* put it: "The popular verdict is clear, unequivocal, and practically unanimous. Hawaii is welcome."[295] Aside from Minister Stevens and his troops, the political class in the United States had no direct role in the revolution; the whole incident came to them as a surprise.[296] By most indications, the American public and its representatives were eager to welcome the surprise.[297] The leaders of both parties appeared signaled their support of annexation.[298] President Harrison and Secretary of State John W. Foster were quite willing to play their dealt card in America's favor, and seemed confident that both parties do, too.[299] While Harrison was in office, an informal Senate poll suggested the Republican-controlled body favored annexation, though only tepidly.[300] As the historians John A.S. Grenville and George Berkeley Young suggest, with some Democrats supporting ratification, "the treaty thus appeared to be sure of speedy ratification—had not Cleveland intervened at this late stage."[301]

Before his second term, Cleveland was a champion of conventional wisdom regarding Hawaii, believing that it was an essential hub of America's growing commercial activity.

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295 Quoted in Grenville and Young, 104–105.
296 Hamilton, *America's New Empire*, chapter 3.
297 As one representative put it: "It is the logical outcome and is favored by too many men of prominence in public life to have another outcome." Quoted in Ernest May, "American Imperialism: A Speculative Essay," *Imprint* 29 (1991), 70.
298 Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 102.
299 Grenville and Young, 105.
300 Robert W. Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), chapter 11.
301 Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 106.

In 1884, when an agreement was pending to establish Pearl Harbor as an exclusive U.S. naval inlet, Cleveland strongly advised the Senate to approve it. Those islands, he said, "are virtually an outpost of American commerce and a stepping-stone to the growing trade of the Pacific."[302] In his first term, Cleveland would speak of the United States' "paramount influence" in Hawaii, owing to "a natural interdependency and mutuality of interest" between the two nations. He said the islands "left almost alone in the enjoyment of their autonomy, which it is important for us should be preserved."[303] Yet it is precisely such an arrangement that would be difficult to resurrect, should the United States retreat and allow its competitors to appropriate its position.[304]

As he was preparing for his reentry into presidential office, Cleveland withheld his opinion of the annexation treaty, even as some newspapers anticipated that the treaty would sail smoothly from the Senate to his pen.[305] Within a week of his inauguration and the seat-

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[302] Quoted in McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 47. At that point, most of Hawaiian sugar went to the continent.
[303] Grover Cleveland, "Second Annual Address, December 6, 1886," in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897,* ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 14–50. See also Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 106–107.
[304] Edmund Janes Carpenter, *America in Hawaii: A History of United States Influence in the Hawaiian Islands* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1899), 152. His Secretary of State, Thomas F. Bayard, would later articulate a slightly harder line: "The obvious course was to wait quietly and patiently, and let the islands fill up with American planters and American industries, until they should be wholly identified in the business interests and political sympathies with the United States. It was simply a matter of waiting until the apple should ripen and fall." McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 48.
[305] McElroy, 52–53.

ing the now Democratic Senate, Cleveland withdrew the treaty "for the purpose of re-examination," before it could be debated.[306] Days later, in a letter to the illustrious German immigrant, Carl Schurz, Cleveland said he is not opposed to annexation of territory, in principle, but that "I am sure we ought to stop and look and think. That's exactly what we are doing now."[307]

Cleveland revealed his suspicions that the overthrow of the queen was an imperialist subversion within days of his inauguration in March 1893, when he commissioned Georgia congressman James H. Blount, an outspoken anti-imperialist, to undertake a four-month investigation into the circumstances that led the queen to relinquish her crown. Blount's report concluded that the dethronement of the queen was an illegal affair in which the United States government was at least indirectly responsible. Blount said that the queen abdicated involuntarily and because the revolutionaries had spoken in the name of the American government and enjoyed the support of the American marines. The inquiry revealed that the annexation plan was excogitated months in advance by Stevens. Furthermore, the revolutionaries were motivated by the promise of power and profit rather than self-defense. The regime change occurred despite native support for the provisional government and the prospect of American annexation. Blount's recommendations pointed squarely against the annexation of the islands and in favor of restoring the monarchy.

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[306] McElroy, 53.

[307] Cleveland to Schurz, March 19, 1893. In Schurz, *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz, Vol 5*, 133–134.

Not surprisingly, Blount's work was praised by anti-imperialists, including the Hawaiian queen herself.[308] One of Cleveland's home newspapers feared that the conspiracy uncovered by Blount's good work threatens to "sully the honor and blacken the fair name of the United States."[309] Equally vociferous were the imperialists and their sympathizers (including Stevens) who complained that Blount's findings were highly tendentious and his method of inquiry biased and selective. "Inaccurate, incomplete, and grossly prejudiced" was how the *Chicago Tribune* described Blount's report.[310] Opponents cried that Blount was less investigator than unapproved diplomat, hired by the administration to devise a pretext that could justify the preexisting, anti-annexationist policy of the administration.[311]

The firestorm around Blount's findings could not have surprised Cleveland, who would have guessed that his hand-picked investigator, a known critic of naval enlargement and strategic expansion, would portray any annexation in unflattering terms. It soon became clear that Blount's report was significant less for its revelations than for confirming to Cleveland that the conditions that would legitimize an annexation were utterly absent in January 1893. In July, Cleveland accepted Blount's report and agreed with its conclusions: the revolution was one of design rather than necessity, made possible by collusion with American associates and illegitimate military reinforcement, and that the provisional government did not come into power with the support of natives, who overwhelmingly opposed annexation. The

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[308] Queen Liliuokalani, *Hawaii's Story By Hawaii's Queen* (Tuttle Publishing, 2011), chapter 38.
[309] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 57.
[310] "The Hawaiian Message." *The Chicago Tribune*, December 19, 1893.
[311] Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, 553.

status quo ante must be restored on the islands, he determined, and the provisional government must hand back its control to the queen. However, Cleveland soon learned that restoring the monarchy would be impossible without bloodshed: the provisional government was unlikely to step down peacefully. The queen, meanwhile, refused to promise clemency to the revolutionaries short of a quick beheading.[312] It became apparent that the kingdom could not be restored without congressionally-authorized military action that would violently restore the queen. That was out of the question.

On December 18, 1893, the awkward impasse led a frustrated Cleveland to transfer back the matter from his executive authority to congressional deliberation. Accompanying Cleveland's decision to hand back the reins to Congress was a rousing, sometimes near-catechetic, six-thousand-word public message. This "masterly" and "powerful" statement (to quote the *New York Times*) laid out in patently moral terms the motivations that led him to interject into congressional deliberations of the treaty, attempt to reverse course, and ultimately (upon recognition of the limits of his choices) re-submit the matter to Congress.[313] Despite the popularity of expansion into the Pacific and the general (though not universal) antipathy toward a foreign queen who had proven unfriendly to the cause of constitutional liberty, his message indicated that nothing deserved more attention than the sins committed

[312] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 63.
[313] "The Hawaiian Message.: President Cleveland's Position Unassailable and Right." *New York Times*, December 20, 1893.

in the name of the United States. "Never," says McElroy, "did he denounce a foreign government more uncompromisingly than he here denounced his own government."[314]

Cleveland's Case Against Hawaiian Annexation

Cleveland's explanation for why he revoked the treaty was almost entirely grounded in his conviction that strategic and economic acquisitiveness, especially against a weak and helpless regime, is a moral crime and a disgraceful demonstration of America's lack of concern for "international morality." His message was partly an effort, in the name of "national honesty," to publicly flagellate America's role in an unlawful conspiracy. It also provided an extended exhortation for the United States government to live up to a code of conduct in foreign policy based on "right and justice"—conduct that is worthy of "the mission and character of our Government and the behavior which the conscience of our people demands of their public servants."[315]

Cleveland argued that Hawaiian annexation was "wholly without justification" because it betrayed the features of imperial conquest. "Our country was in danger of occupying the position of having actually set up a temporary government on foreign soil for the purpose of acquiring through that agency territory which we had wrongfully put in its possession," he

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[314] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 65.

[315] All quotations from Cleveland's message retrieved from: Grover Cleveland, "Special Message," December 18, 1893. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=70788.

said. It was forcible in that it proceeded despite visible native support for American governance. To any reasonable observer, it appeared as a concocted scheme to acquire territory rather than a transparent and internationally defendable state action. Despite Senate deliberation, annexation also fails any domestic legal standard, as it was initiated by conspirators who had skirted ordinary constitutional procedures and arrogated to themselves undue authority. Most incriminating, argued Cleveland, the good name of the United States was made an accomplice to transgressive actions animated by impure motivations—a "desire for territorial extension, or dissatisfaction with a form of government not our own."

In his address, Cleveland never denied the merits of the arguments made by annexationists, including Stevens, that American control of the islands would redound to the material, economic, and strategic benefit of the continent. Cleveland provided no indication that his views have changed about the importance of motioning American influence over Hawaii. In fact, noting America's long tradition of acquiring new territories, he affirmed America's general right to annexation.[316] Yet every general right is delimited by conditions, and it was the nefarious motivation and circumstances of the revolution that led him to believe "that the United States could not…annex the islands without justly incurring the imputation of acquiring them by unjustifiable methods."

[316] While Cleveland was sympathetic to the more limited arguments of anti-imperialists like Schurz, who had argued that Hawaiian annexation was impractical and unnecessary, he had also said he (unlike them) is not against annexation as a general principle. Cleveland to Schurz, March 19, 1893. In Schurz, *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz, Vol 5*, 133–34.

For Cleveland, the overthrow of the queen had to be condemned precisely *because* it was driven by strategic and material interests. Cleveland censured Stevens' "ardent desire" for American control of the islands as precipitating intervention that superseded proper political and legal procedures (both constitutional and diplomatic), which Stevens had dismissed as inconvenient formalities. On the blatantly bogus excuse of self-defense, Stevens dispatched 160 marines in order to exploit a local event and use it as a pretext to secure Hawaii for America. Citing Blount's report, Cleveland said that "There is as little basis for the pretense that such forces were landed for the security of American life and property." Stevens' indiscretion betrayed premeditated conspiracy stemming from opportunity rather than necessity.

Cleveland was undoubtedly correct in his estimation that Stevens was a supporter of annexation and was looking for a golden opportunity to exploit. Even after the overthrow of the queen, Stevens publicly championed the cause of American annexation.[317] But Stevens' case was not wholly based on notions of national aggrandizement and interest. Cleveland ignored Stevens' argument that the American interest has proven to be a facilitator of the *islands*' general prosperity, and that annexation would serve *indigenous* interests. Since the Hawaiian Islands were in danger of becoming a satellite of another, much less friendly, foreign power, the question, for Stevens, was simply *which* power would be the first to pluck the pear from the geostrategic tree. In that respect, Stevens argued that there was little doubt that

[317] "These islands will be accepted and placed among the jewels of America's future crown of empire and glory. Failing to accept this valuable prize would surely bring our statesmen to the bar of history with the indictment of blundering criminality, from which there could be no escape." "Stevens and Hawaii: The Ex-Minister Points Out the Advantage of Annexation." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 2, 1893.

the natives would be far better off under American power. The United States has long-term, vested interests in the territories, whereas other powers would use the islands as their navy's way-station, exploiting the islands for their transient needs.[318]

As to the Polynesian kingdom's current government, Stevens had pointed to the deleterious corruption of monarchy, both in principle and its instantiation in the Pacific, as evidence that republicanism would be a significant improvement of conditions for the islanders, including the natives. "In truth the monarchy here is an absurd anachronism," Stevens wrote to the secretary of state, months before the rebellion took place. "It has nothing on which it logically or legitimately stands. The feudal basis on which it once stood no longer existing, the monarchy now is only an impediment to good government—an obstruction to the prosperity and progress of the islands."[319] In sum, Stevens had made a robust case that American annexation is justified both by American and native interests.

It is not difficult to understand why, in his message, Cleveland does not recount Stevens' humanitarian argument with great detail. In the first place, Cleveland argues that it is hypocritical to make a case in favor of the installation of a republican government that "owes its existence to an armed invasion by the United States."[320] Even a superior, less corrupt,

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[318] Mr. Stevens to Mr. Foster, November 20, 1892; Mr. Stevens to Mr. Blaine, March 8, 1892. In *Papers Relating to the Annexation of the Hawaiian Islands to the United States*: United States Congress (Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1893).

[319] Mr. Stevens to Mr. Foster. November 20, 1892. In

[320] Cleveland expresses skepticism that the provisional government can be considered republican since its founders believed that its subjects are unfit for self-rule. "Indeed, the representatives of that government assert that the people of Hawaii are unfit for popular government and frankly avow that they can be best ruled by arbitrary or despotic power."

more republican government is nevertheless illegitimate if it emerges from unlawful procedures. Cleveland suggests that even well-meaning regime change on republican principles can be an illegal (and therefore immoral) affair. For however badly the native government serves its people, it is nevertheless the only "lawful authority" on the islands—and an authority that broke no promises to the United States and posed no direct and immediate threat to Americans. The "feeble but friendly" regime was therefore entitled to its sovereign right of self-determination and self-rule, which includes the freedom to determine its own political institutions, including those that fall short of American standards:

> While naturally sympathizing with every effort to establish a republican of government, it has been the settled policy of the United States to concede to people of foreign countries the same freedom and independence in the management of their domestic affairs that we have always claimed for ourselves; and it has been our practice to recognize revolutionary governments as soon as it became apparent that they were supported by the people.

Cleveland grounded America's legal and moral obligations to the monarchy in the principle of international sovereign equality, which he said is analogous to civil equality. "The law of nations is founded upon reason and justice, and the rules of conduct governing individual relations between citizens or subjects of a civilized state are equally applicable as between enlightened nations." The moral test of the nation's fidelity to international law is deepened and more urgent when legal transgressions are more tempting, as they are to the stronger power that can easily prey upon the weak:

> It has been the boast of our government that it seeks to do justice in all things without regard to the strength or weakness of those with whom it deals. I mistake the American people if they favor the odious doctrine that there is no such thing as international morality, that there is one law for a strong nation and another for a weak

> one, and that even by indirection a strong power may with impunity despoil a weak one of its territory.

As the power disparity between nations grow, so too does the meaningfulness of a great power's restrained conduct. Cleveland acknowledged that international law does not enjoy the enforcement mechanisms of domestic law. However, as he argued, international law's reliance on the "good faith" and "conscience" of its members are attributes that endow the law with its moral power. Such absence of enforcement, he says, "only give additional sanction to the law itself and brand any deliberate infraction of it not merely as a wrong but as a disgrace":

> A man of true honor protects the unwritten word which binds his conscience more scrupulously, if possible, than he does the bond a breach of which subjects him to legal liabilities; and the United States in aiming to maintain itself as one of the most enlightened of nations would do its citizens gross injustice if it applied to its international relations any other than a high standard of honor and morality. On that ground the United States cannot properly be put in the position of countenancing a wrong after its commission any more than in that of consenting to it in advance.

Cleveland argued that the annexation treaty is a pernicious danger to American character because it suggests the United States is willing to opportunistically undermine international law and countenance injustice when doing so redounds to the material and strategic benefit of the nation. Much of the damage has already been done, Cleveland said. Shining a light on it, or "national honesty," as his address explained, is the first step. The second step is for the United States to undo the illicit conspiracy and restore the monarchy, as far as doing so is practicable. "The United States can not fail to vindicate its honor and its sense of justice by an earnest effort to make all possible reparation," he said.

Despite Cleveland's strong words and success in persuading many Democrats to his cause, his efforts to right the wrong in Hawaii had only mixed success. Cleveland stance was consistent with Southern and Western opposition to annexation.[321] Pro-annexationist senators, including those within Cleveland's party, questioned the President's interference, especially by his manner of unilaterally appointing Blount. In February of 1894, a Senate-commissioned report overseen by Democrat (and advocate of expansion) John T. Morgan, contradicted some of Blount's findings on key points and exonerated Stevens' actions, leading to a Senate resolution prohibiting further executive intervention against the provisional government of Hawaii.[322] However, although reinstalling the kingdom was no longer expedient, Congress agreed on a policy of future non-interference, tacitly sanctioning the status quo, but formally and explicitly affirming the President's argument that the setting up of the provisional government "was contrary to the traditions of our Republic and the spirit of our Constitution, and should be and is condemned…. [W]e heartily approve the principle announced by the President of the United States that interference with the domestic affairs of an independent nation is contrary to the spirit of American institutions."[323] In July of 1894, as Hawaii's provisional government became the Hawaiian republic, modeled after American institutions, Cleveland acknowledged that a stable civil government was now in operation,

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[321] Peter Trubowitz, *Defining the National Interest: Conflict and Change in American Foreign Policy* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 58.
[322] Joseph A Fry, *John Tyler Morgan and the Search for Southern Autonomy* (University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 81–87.
[323] U.S. Government Printing Office, "Speech of Hon. Robert R. Hitt, Feb. 2 and 3, 1894," in *Congressional Record* U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894), 440.

fulfilling its functions and obligations as a state. Whatever sins made its formation possible, there was no longer doubt that it now deserved presumed legitimacy. On May 27, 1896, the Hawaiian legislature adopted a unanimous joint resolution declaring that it is "firmly and steadfastly in favor of the Annexation of the Hawaiian Islands to the United States of America."[324]

Even if Cleveland's opposition to annexation did not permanently change the course of American foreign policy, his manner and reasons for opposition successfully politicized questions that many were eager to ignore. From the perspective of his political opponents, Cleveland had "blackguarded the foreign policy of his predecessor before the world."[325] In making the issue a partisan one, he forced Republicans (and pro-annexation Democrats) to, for the first time, defend a policy in light of the unseemly facts, in light of its moral shortfall when juxtaposed against the nation's high standards of "international morality."

Throughout his final years in office and throughout his retirement, Cleveland described his decision to politicize the matter as a success. In June of 1897, when President McKinley submitted a new annexation treaty to the Senate, Cleveland regarded his own actions as noble attempts to rectify the wrongs—a means of protecting "American honor and probity" by demonstrating grave discomfort with an instance of a disgraceful disregard of

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[324] "Laws of the Rep. of Hawaii, 1896, 274. In United States Government Printing Office, "Annexation of Hawaii," in *Congressional Serial Set* 1901), 278.
[325] Henry James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service* (Literary Licensing, LLC, 2014), 94.

justice.[326] When annexation was consummated and the American flag was raised in Honolulu in 1898, Cleveland maintained that he was disgusted by the original sins that had made it possible. Writing to Richard Olney, he said: "As I look back upon the first steps in this miserable business and as I contemplate the means used to complete the outrage, I am ashamed of the whole affair."[327]

Although the response to Cleveland's 1893 message was predictably mixed and did not enjoy long-term success, few denied the President's earnestness. In March of 1897, when McKinley met with a delegation from the Hawaiian government, one of its members, William Smith, noted that

> The difference between the attitude of the present administration and the last one is like that of the difference between daylight and darkness. The present is a friendly one, waiting for the best opportunity and most favorable means of presenting the matter. The other was irrevocably opposed to it.[328]

Without predicting that Cleveland would be successful, the Democratic and independent press praised Cleveland for, in *The Boston Globe*'s words, acting "as his conscience dictates." The paper's editors estimated that "He will assuredly lose neither honor nor reputation because he has been scrupulous to do all that he could consistent with law to make amends for what he sincerely believe was a great wrong."[329] *The Waterbury* of Connecticut praised Cleveland for doing "all that was possible for patriotism, and a high ideal of what the American

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[326] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 70.
[327] McElroy, 73.
[328] Quoted in Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands*, 216.
[329] "That Hawaiian Message." *Boston Globe*, December 17, 1893.

good name demands before the nations of the earth."[330] Cleveland's early, sympathetic biographer wrote that Cleveland overturned a popular policy and invited the conflict "solely in the interest of international justice, solely that another weak and defenseless people might remain free."[331]

Cleveland's loyal defenders may have exaggerated the President's noble altruism—after all, he did not describe his position in those terms, and he clearly sought a policy that he believed would save his own country (and perhaps his own administration) from the ignominy of territorial invasion. On the other hand, contemporary scholars undoubtedly exaggerate the cynicism of efforts, too quickly dismissing or misrepresenting his articulated intentions and well-reasoned arguments. Beginning especially with Charles and Mary Beards' claim that "it was mainly sugar that precipitated the crisis," deterministic accounts have sought to play down Cleveland's temporary "delay" of the inevitable, and play up the structural constraints at work.[332] For example, according to LaFeber, Cleveland, while "righteously rejecting the burdens of governing a polyglot population located two thousand miles from the mainland," was acting shrewdly, in a way that acknowledged economic and social

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[330] Quoted in "The Hawaiian Message," *New York Times*, December 20, 1893.

[331] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 45.

[332] Beard and Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, Vol II, 359–360. As Hamilton argues, the Beards' evidence for their claims amounts to specious anecdotes. A careful study of the available evidence suggests that the majority of the large sugar planters were on record as opposing annexation. See Hamilton, *America's New Empire*, 84. See also Richard D. Weigle, "Sugar and the Hawaiian Revolution," *The Pacific Historical Review* XVI (1947).

pessimism while tightening America's hold on the islands.[333] Zakaria, meanwhile, points additionally to a divided government and a "bleak atmosphere," caused by a devastating financial crisis, as temporarily dampening expansionist fervor.[334] "The movement to annex Hawaii…failed because of America's economic troubles," he asserts.[335] For Hunt, the determinative cause of the "delay" of annexation was the racial fears of anti-annexationists.[336]

Such exogenous factors can reasonably be said to have contributed to the "delay" of annexation, as well as its eventual realization. However, one would struggle to find any evidence in Cleveland's own words that his reasons had anything to do with economic constraints, strategic maneuvering, racism, and resistance to irrepressible institutional and geostrategic forces. In fact, his explanations for inviting conflict and attempting to reverse what many saw to be a fated juggernaut constituted coherent and well-reasoned arguments that impressed those who listened, convincing many that the United States was about to ratify a

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[333] LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 203 ff. Much of LaFeber's case relies on demonstrating that officials at the time had favored advancing American influence in Hawaii. Of course, Cleveland himself had made plain he favored American influence there and was open to future annexation. LaFeber's circumstantial evidence does not contradict Cleveland's reasons for opposing annexation in 1893. On the other hand, Cleveland's case gives us reasons to doubt the conclusion reached by LaFeber about Cleveland's motives.

[334] "As economic chaos and social violence again upset the American scene, many people wondered what business the nation had in so assiduously searching for new problems." Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, 145.

[335] Zakaria, 144.

[336] "Critics, repelled by the prospect of incorporating masses of nonwhites, warned against the perils of miscegenation that would produce a feeble, half-breed race on the islands and stressed that the inherent inferiority of native peoples prevented them from rising to the level of full and responsible citizenship. They would remain mere subjects, unassimilable and forever a millstone around the national neck." Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 81. See also Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 288–296.

treaty without acknowledging or attempting to rectify the corruption that had made it possible.

Broadly, Cleveland's public disapprobation of his own government was grounded in a concern for demonstrating America's moral commitment to international law and explaining the importance of subsuming strategic and commercial temptations to a legal code of conduct. More specifically, it was grounded in Cleveland's view that intervention of a sovereign state is only justified when there is a direct danger to American lives and property, proceeds according to domestic and diplomatic formalities, and refrains from establishing American rule that does not follow the affirmative assent of natives. Unlike many anti-imperialists, he was not opposed to annexation in principle, nor did he indicate any change of heart regarding his long-held view that the United States must protect its interests on the islands. Cleveland believed that territorial expansion, however closely tied to national interests, must be lawful, and never proceed simply from a "desire for territorial extension, or dissatisfaction with a form of government not our own."[337] A non-threatening sovereign government behaving lawfully deserves territorial and political integrity, regardless of whether that sovereign government is democratic or whether American political interference would redound to the benefit of the indigenous natives. For Cleveland, the written and unwritten rules governing all nations hold force not despite, but *because* they are based on principles that are blind to

[337] Cleveland, "President's Message Relating to the Hawaiian Islands: December 18, 1893."

earthly power disparity, have no institutional enforcement, and depend on voluntary, conscience-driven obedience. As the relative strength of a nation increases and temptations to press its advantage increase, so too does its responsibility to vindicate international law, and its opportunity to demonstrate its exceptional commitment to international morality through virtuous self-restraint.

Cleveland had lived to see these arguments, and his policy intentions, twisted and misunderstood. In his retirement, Cleveland was outraged by annexationist opportunists, including some Democrats, who misrepresented his stance in 1893 in order to draw support for their policies. Writing to the Senate in 1898, the ex-president said: "I will…say that ever since the question of Hawaiian annexation was presented I have been utterly and constantly opposed to it…. I regarded, and still regard, the proposed annexation of these islands as not only opposed to our national policy, but as a perversion of our national mission." Cleveland rejected any notion that his policy was either an alliance with Hawaiian monarchy or as a duplicitous way to bargain toward a more favorable treaty. Rather, he simply believed that American involvement with the overthrow was "disgraceful." "I would gladly, therefore, for the sake of our national honor and our country's fair name, have repaired that wrong."[338]

[338] Grover Cleveland, "Message to the Senate, January 24, 1898," in *The Advocate of Peace (Volumes 60-61)*, ed. American Peace Society American Peace Society, 1898), 35.

Cleveland was vexed that, since he had left the White House, his intentions had been divorced from his contemporaneously articulated justifications. "I did not suppose that there was anyone in public life who misunderstood my position on this matter."[339]

THE ANGLO-VENEZUELAN BOUNDARY DISPUTE (1894–1897)

In the case of Hawaii, Cleveland had attempted to thwart American annexation of the strategically vital islands on the basis that his nation had unjustly interfered with its politics and must reverse course to prove its virtue to itself and the world. The following year, the President turned south and interposed his administration into a bilateral territorial quarrel between Venezuela and Great Britain, the global hegemon of the day. For many historians, the case of the Anglo-Venezuelan border dispute reveals an altogether different Cleveland—one who, by escalating a diplomatic dispute into a diplomatic crisis, "had risked involving the United States in a shooting war with England" over a matter that did not affect American lives or property.[340] In other words, Cleveland was charged with having exercised the kind of meddlesomeness he had long criticized. Ultimately, the affair ended peacefully: In February 1897, Britain yielded to arbitration and, in October 1899, a settlement was reached. Despite the anticlimactic conclusion, Cleveland's decision to intervene in the dispute is regarded as an unprecedented assertion of American power in the hemisphere—or what one historian calls "the most important incident in the foreign policy of the second

[339] Cleveland, 35.
[340] Brodsky, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Character*, 375.

Cleveland administration, with the possible exception of Hawaii, and one of the most important in all of the nineteenth century."[341] Cleveland himself regarded it as among his proudest achievements.[342] Despite the great importance of the controversy, Cleveland's intentions in intervening in it has eluded scholars. As Grenville and Young explain, "Historians have generally been at a loss to account for Cleveland's decision to embark on a new policy toward the Anglo-Venezuelan quarrel during the closing months of 1894."[343]

Most analyses of the episode proceed from a cursory dismissal of Cleveland's justifications for his policy. We are informed that they amount to ridiculous reinventions of the Monroe Doctrine or highly cynical exploitation of Venezuelan grievances for the purpose of advancing America's hemispheric power. His positioning is described as a tactical announcement of U.S. strategic and commercial hegemony in the hemisphere, a pivotal prelude to the openly expansionist aims of his successors and the eventual global preeminence of the nation—"a milestone in the emergence of the United States as a world power," as Grenville and Young put it.[344] Given the consequential, if not earth-shifting, implications of Cleveland's maneuvers, it is remarkable that so much of the evidence hangs on the loosest inferences and insinuations, and so little effort is made to understand Cleveland's decisions in

[341] Charles W Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato: The Life of Walter Q. Gresham* (University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 214; LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 242.
[342] Grover Cleveland, *Presidential Problems* (The Century, 1904), chapter IV.
[343] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 140.
[344] Grenville and Young, 157.

light of his own extensive explanations, many of which are explicitly addressed to his perplexed contemporaries.

An intentional analysis of Cleveland's private and public reflections, correspondence, and addresses suggest a more complex mixture of motives—both moral and prudential—that are irreducible to the acquisitive, strategic, and politically cynical motivations often imputed to him. Cleveland (and his new secretary of state, Richard Olney) acknowledged that the United States had a security interest in preventing great powers from unlawfully aggrandizing their territory in the hemisphere. However, much to the confusion of their audience (both in his and our day), they did not elucidate any immediate or specific security interest in intervening in a dispute over the uninhabitable hinterlands. Nor, contrary to what is implied by many scholars, did they justify their policy as a means of commercial or strategic aggrandizement. As we shall see, Cleveland's arguments in favor of intervention in Venezuela were largely congruent with his justifications against intervention in Hawaii. Both involved the paramount importance of demonstrating the nation's commitment to international law. He explained that it was America's responsibility to heed Venezuela's claims of injury and force Britain to arbitration because the alternative was "supine submission to wrong and injustice."[345] As the only power in the hemisphere capable of enforcing international rules, the

[345] Grover Cleveland, "Special Message on the Venezuela Boundary Dispute, Washington, D.C., December 17, 1895," in *Letters and Addresses of Grover Cleveland*, ed. Albert Ellery Bergh Unit Book Publishing Company, 1909).

United States is bound by a commitment to its security and character to discredit the pernicious principle that superior strength dictates international justice.

The Context

The Venezuela boundary dispute was decades old by the time Cleveland decided that the United States must take an aggressive step in resolving it. In 1814, as part of a settlement of the Napoleonic Wars, Great Britain had gained control over the Dutch territory of Guiana (known today as Guyana), a former Spanish colony on the west side of Venezuela. In 1841, Britain and Venezuela had begun quarreling over the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana in what was called the Schomburgk Line, which flowed through a jungle marking Britain's western boundary. The furor focused especially on the mouth of the Orinoco River, one of the longest rivers in South America, and whose gold-rich mouth at the Atlantic Ocean was a key gateway to one-quarter of South America. Throughout the decades, and especially in the 1880s, Venezuela sought a settlement, while Britain gradually and opportunistically enlarged its claims, hoping that Venezuelan internal political fragility would eventually give way to greater British territorial bounty.[346] Beginning in the 1860s, as British claims became more expansive, Venezuela appealed to Washington to intervene, arguing that America's Monroe Doctrine implies an interest and a right to determine the merits of the disputants. However, despite Britain's stated willingness to negotiate, Washington

[346] Venezuelan internal dissension and revolutions in this period also led British statesmen to doubt that there was any legitimate representation to with whom to negotiate. James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service*, 98.

exerted little effort to advance the stalemate. As Herring explains, "Venezuela numerous times sought to draw the United States into it by speaking of violations of Monroe's statement. Each time, Washington had politely declined…"[347] Washington's somewhat tepid responses began to change in December of 1894, when Cleveland announced he would "renew the efforts heretofore made to bring about a restoration of diplomatic relations between the disputants and to induce a reference to arbitration—a resort which Great Britain so conspicuously favors in principle and respects in practice and which is earnestly sought by her weaker adversary."[348] As Herring explains, "it is not entirely clear why Cleveland now took up a challenge his predecessors had sensibly resisted."[349]

What explains Cleveland's decision to depart from the "sensible" path of his predecessors and risk war over a far-flung jungle? Since at least Charles Beard's intellection, historians and political scientists have pointed to the trajectory of American power in the hemisphere to argue that it was a thirst for national power and profit, combined with efforts to divert attention from domestic problems, that drove the United States to intrude itself into an issue of dubious urgency. These accounts attribute U.S. intervention to the deliberate pursuit of commercial and strategic hegemony.[350] As Hamilton shows in his critical review of

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[347] Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, 287.
[348] Quoted in Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere Since 1776* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 157.
[349] Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, 287.
[350] Beard, *Contemporary American History, 1877-1913*, 199.

the scholarship, the portrayal of the episode is interpreted "as one of series of events that ultimately had world-historic significance," the beginning of a new effort in which "the United States was both demonstrating its power and 'reaching out' for an empire."[351]

Following Frederick Jackson Turner's influential thesis that the "closing of the frontier" led to foreign "outreach" campaigns to satiate growing economic needs, some accounts attribute Cleveland's foray into British Guiana as a manifestation of an inexorable profit motive.[352] LaFeber says that this episode was a pivotal maneuver to "control one of the continent's great commercial waterways."[353] It "indicated the explosive potential of the conclusion reached by American political and business leaders that overseas commercial expansion could solve the economic stagnation and the attendant social unrest."[354]

Other accounts attribute U.S. intervention to the domestic and international pressures that compelled an unprecedented expansion of American power. For Zakaria, "The magnitude of American power and the absence of significant threats made the expansion of American influence in the area inevitable."[355] And yet, even while Zakaria implies that political leaders were pawns of irrepressible domestic and international forces, "the United States'

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[351] Hamilton concludes that the "progressive view" of the Venezuela situation, which holds commercial motives as paramount, are "poorly supported." Hamilton, *America's New Empire*, 136–140.
[352] Gary B. Nash*, et al.*, *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society* (Addison-Wesley, 2000), 657.
[353] Walter LaFeber, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations: Volume 2: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865–1913* (1993), 118.
[354] LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion*, *1860–1898*, 242.
[355] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, 149.

right to intervene in any matter relating to any state in the hemisphere" is described as a result of the concerted diplomatic maneuvers by Cleveland and Olney to compel Britain's submission.[356] Lars Schoultz argues that the episode was "an announcement that the United States intended to move upward on the hierarchy of nations, even if European powers thought the idea presumptuous."[357] He attributes this announcement to the "U.S. officials in the late nineteenth century" who recognized the significance of their actions with greater awareness than observers a half-century later.[358] One of those officials, according to Herring, was the President himself. Cleveland, Herring says, was "determined to use the dispute to assert U.S. preeminence in the Western Hemisphere."[359] If true, the outspoken anti-imperialist in the White House was not so different from Alfred T. Mahan, Theodore Roosevelt, and Henry Cabot Lodge in sensing an imperative to unshackle the United States from its tradition of isolation. As Herring puts it, in the case of the Venezuela matter, "even the normally cautious and anti-expansionist Cleveland was not immune to the spirit of the age."[360] If such depictions are correct, the characteristically judicious Cleveland had risked war over Venezuelan hinterlands to catapult the United States into its destined role as the hemisphere's master.

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[356] Zakaria, 152.
[357] Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U. S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 124.
[358] Schoultz, 124.
[359] Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, 307.
[360] Herring, 306.

Deterministic studies attribute American commercial and strategic dominance in the early twentieth-century to the antecedent assessments, deliberations, and intentions of responsible political actors. Thus, it is fair to ask: What evidence is there that the Cleveland and his ministers sought the goals imputed to them?

Cleveland's Case for Intervention in the Anglo-Venezuelan Dispute

Richard Olney's July 1895 memo, often described as the "Olney Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, is the most important first clue to answering this question.[361] Olney's statement was addressed to London after extensive conferral with the President, who would praise the memo effusively.[362] It called for Britain to submit evidence for her partitives regarding British Guiana or to yield to American-led investigation and arbitration.[363] For many scholars, the bumptious memo that Cleveland called "Olney's twenty-inch gun" was Olney's *smoking* twenty-inch gun—a betrayal of national-aggrandizing motives through the brazen distortion of the Monroe Doctrine. In the course of a few sentences, Olney is said to have justified America's hemispheric right on the basis of America's hemispheric might:

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[361] Secretary of State of the United States, Mr. Richard Olney to Mr. Thomas Bayard, Ambassador of the United States to Great Britain, July 20, 1895, in U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, (*Foreign Relations of the United States*), 1895, 545–562.

[362] The memo is clearly important, not least because it was directed, edited, and approved by the President and emerged after several weeks of discussions between the two. (Eggert, 200) Cleveland later called it "the best thing of the kind I have ever read and it leads to a conclusion that one cannot escape if he tries—that is, if there is anything of the Monroe Doctrine at all. You show there is a great deal of that and place it, I think, on better and more defensible ground than any of your predecessors—or mine." Quoted in LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 259.

[363] See, for example, Gary B. Nash, et al., *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society* (Addison-Wesley, 2000), 657.

> Today the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition. Why? It is not because of the pure friendship or good will felt for it. It is not simply by reason of its high character as a civilized state, nor because wisdom and justice and equity are the invariable characteristics of the dealings of the United States. It is because, in addition to all other grounds, its infinite resources combined with its isolated position render it master of the situation and practically invulnerable as against any or all other powers.

Thus, a policy of neutrality and non-interference, once meant to prevent European colonization in the Western hemisphere, it appears, gave way to a new imperative to settle *any* outstanding matters that concerns European powers in the hemisphere, regardless of threat proximity.[364] In this telling, the parochial subject of controversy—a remote jungle over 1,000 miles away from American shores—was incidental to the true purpose. Olney, says Zakaria, was "asserting an American protectorate over the entire hemisphere."[365]

If such an interpretation is correct, we are immediately forced to confront a contradiction: Olney states explicitly that the Monroe Doctrine "does not establish any general protectorate by the United American states over other American states."[366] In reality, Olney's famous two sentences are part of a memo over 11,000-words long in which he repeatedly rejects the notion that legal or moral authority can be purchased through the power of the

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[364] According to the historian Ralph Volney Harlow, Olney's statement was a cynical attempt to take the side of Venezuela while draping American power in a dubious legal cloak. Ralph Volney Harlow, *The United States: From Wilderness to World Power* (Syracuse: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 514–516.

[365] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, 149.

[366] Olney repeated this point in an address delivered before the American Society of International Law, (April 20, 1907): "The United States under the Monroe Doctrine assumes no protectorate over any other American state; attempts no interference with the external any more than with the internal affairs of such a state; asserts no right to dictate the domestic or the foreign policy of such a state; and claims no right to use force in the affairs of such a state except as against its enemies and to aid it in defending its political and territorial integrity as against European aggression." Richard Olney, "The Development of International Law," *American Journal of International Law* I, no. 2 (1907), 423.

United States (or any other power). While Olney does not deny the "practical benefits" of the Monroe Doctrine to national security, he summarily rejects the notion that the doctrine is an imperious absolution of international law or that it authorizes the United States to do whatever it wishes because of its strength.[367] Years later, in an 1898 speech about the Monroe Doctrine and the Venezuelan issue, Olney would say that "We are now, as always, under the restraint of the principles of international law, which bid us respect the sovereignty of every other nation and forbid our intermeddling in its internal affairs."[368] That Olney of 1898 was merely repeating the argument of his 1895 memo, which explicitly denied that the Monroe Doctrine is a legitimate justification for interfering in external disputes on the basis of American might.

What, then, did Olney mean when he said America's "fiat is law"? Olney's statement only makes sense in the context of his extended argument in the memo. As Olney explained, the Monroe Doctrine's purpose is to protect domestic liberty and self-government by treating any fresh acquisitions as potentially irreversible, looming threats. The United States must

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[367] "It does not relieve any American state from its obligations as fixed by international law nor prevent any European Power directly interested from enforcing such obligations or from inflicting merited punishment for the breach of them. It does not contemplate any interference in the internal affairs of any American state or in the relations between it and other American states. It does not justify any attempt on our part to change the established of government of any American state or to prevent the people of such state from altering that according to their own will and pleasure. The rule in question has but a single purpose and object. It is that no European power or combination of European powers shall forcibly deprive an American state of the right and power of self-government and of shaping for itself its own political fortunes and destinies." *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1895, 555.

[368] Richard Olney, "International Isolation of the United States (Address Delivered at Sanders Theatre, Harvard College, March 2, 1898)," *Atlantic Monthly*, 1898, 6.

deter such threats when it is "only the United States [that] has the strength adequate" to defend its free institutions from European encroachment.[369] If Venezuela's claims are true (and Olney does not say that they are, only that they may be), then the United States—the only hemispheric power presently so capable—is obligated to repel British conquest as a matter of continuing its established policy of deterrence.

Of course, even if we accept Olney's broad argument about the preventive nature of the Monroe Doctrine, the dangers of European proximity to American security, and the fact that only the United States is capable of preventing the danger, we are left wondering how, in practical terms, British claims in Venezuela might lead to an extreme scenario whereby the "integrity, tranquility, or welfare" of the United States is endangered. To put it another way, even if the United States has a *right* to protect its security by intervening in the British Guiana matter, Olney has not explained why it is *expedient* or *prudent* that the United States flex the doctrine's muscles in *this* case—especially given the prospect that doing so threatens to make a great adversary a dangerous enemy. The failure to provide a specific connection between Monroe's principles and the putative threat in Venezuela is the key weakness of Olney's memo (and of Cleveland's own subsequent explication of his policy). It has raised questions over whether Olney's inexperience in diplomacy and the hasty manner in which he was thrust into his position contributed to this carelessness.[370] It is also fair to wonder if the

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[369] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1895, 557.

[370] Olney was thrust into his position unexpectedly when he took over after Gresham's death in May of 1895. Although Olney became a thoughtful voice on international affairs, it is not clear the extent of his knowledge before his new position. Historians are radically divided on this question. For contrasting views, see Karl

strained prudential argument is merely a pretext toward some other strategic end—such as the assertion of America's hemispheric preeminence. However, if we follow that logic, we are compelled again to acknowledge that Olney's long memo never suggests that the United States seeks to establish a protectorate or commercial hegemony, not least by the facts of national strength. Indeed, as we have seen, Olney explicitly, vigorously rejects that argument.

What Olney *does* convey in his long memo is a sustained, yet usually ignored, moral justification for intervention—a justification that became a prominent theme in Cleveland's own private and public justifications for his arbitration policy.[371] This moral argument: the United States cannot withstand the prospect of a settlement to a territorial dispute in the hemisphere resulting from a brute assertion of power.[372] Olney says that inaction by the United States—the only hemispheric power presently capable of deterring Britain—would serve as a vindication of the principle that there is no international justice. As he explained, Britain's claims on the basis of its strength—"it is to be so because I will it to be so"—combined with Venezuela's "feebleness as a nation," effectively proves the principle that the weak are "to be denied the right of having the claim heard and passed upon by an impartial tribunal." Olney argues that such a principle is universally damaging: It "deprives Venezuela of

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Schriftgiesser, *The Gentleman From Massachusetts: Henry Cabot Lodge* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1944), 133; Gerald G. Eggert, *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974), 200; Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1867-1907* (Literary Licensing, LLC, 1937), 14–48.

[371] When Olney's moral argument is not ignored by scholars, it is usually mistaken as strategically taking the side of Venezuela. See, for example, Harlow, *The United States: From Wilderness to World Power*, 514–516.

[372] As Olney explains, Britain is effectively telling Venezuela: "You can get none of the debatable land by force, because you are not strong enough; you can get none by treaty, because I will not agree; and you can take your chance of getting a portion by arbitration only if you first agree to abandon to me such other portion as I may designate." *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1895, 561.

her free agency." It also degrades Britain as a nation that does not "love of justice and fair play." Finally, by averting its eyes when it has the strength to prevent it, the principle suggests the United States is ignoring the Monroe Doctrine, a "policy with which the honor and welfare of this country are closely identified."[373]

Several months after Olney's memo was delivered, he wrote a draft congressional statement for Cleveland that made the point in even more morally stark terms. Olney wrote that that are no calamities, including war, that is "to be more deprecated or more to be shunned than those which follow from a supine submission to wrong and injustice and the consequent loss of national honor and self-respect."[374] For Olney, the Monroe Doctrine was an "accepted public law of this country" that was an instantiation of a universal right, anchored in a core principle of international law—and it is that core principle that the United States has every right and obligation to maintain.[375] In other words, Olney's moral argument is nearly the opposite of the one imputed to him by future scholars. As he stated repeatedly both while serving in office and during his retirement, his policy was based on the imperative to use national power to *prevent* the conclusion that might makes right.[376]

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[373] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1895, 560

[374] It continues: "That our request to Great Britain calls upon her for nothing more than justice and equity in her dealings with a weaker state, and that our honor and self-respect as well as our material interests are deeply concerned in her action upon such request, are matters which are fully set forth elsewhere and need not be here again discussed…. In behalf of a cause which appeals to their sense of right, no loss and no sacrifice that may be exacted will be denied or begrudged by the American people." Quoted in James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service*, 121.

[375] Eggert, *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman*, 204–210.

[376] Olney, "The Development of International Law"; Olney, "International Isolation of the United States (Address Delivered at Sanders Theatre, Harvard College, March 2, 1898)."

In 1912, Woodrow Wilson's secretary of state, Philander C. Knox, delivered a speech to the New York State Bar Association that discussed Olney's by-then-famous fiat-is-law statement:

> The spirit behind these words contemplated, I am sure, no arbitrary exercise of sheer power, but a determined zeal in magnanimous consideration for the rights of other American Republics, a sincere sympathy with them in their trials, an insistence upon the right, that good might come to them, and that our own vital interests should not be menaced.[377]

Looking back on the Venezuelan episode, Olney had expressed regret that most people had "only most dimly and imperfectly comprehend[ed] what the government had done or why it had done it."[378] But he wrote Knox to praise him for his "comprehending view" of the administration's motivations.[379]

The pervasive misunderstanding of Olney's July memo is a legacy of the memo's contemporaneous critics, the most prominent of whom was Britain's Lord Salisbury.[380] In November, Salisbury replied to the Cleveland administration by charging it with pretending, for domestic political purposes, that the Monroe Doctrine was a law that demanded obedience of other nations. In truth, he said, the dictum was irrelevant to the quarrel in British Guiana since the territorial contest preceded the famous 1823 doctrine and the establishment

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[377] Philander C. Knox, "Report of New York State Bar Association (1912)."
[378] Olney, "International Isolation of the United States (Address Delivered at Sanders Theatre, Harvard College, March 2, 1898)," 2.
[379] Olney to Knox, January 29, 1912. Quoted in James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service*, 141.
[380] See, for example, Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1867-1907*, 143.

of the Venezuelan state in 1845.[381] Salisbury argued that, unlike the Monroe Doctrine, international law "is rounded on the general consent of nations," and the United States has no authority to arrogate to itself the role of judge of a controversy unrelated to its sovereignty: "No statesman, however eminent, and no nation, however powerful, are competent to insert into the code of international law a novel principle which was never recognized before and which has not since been accepted by the government of any other country."[382] Salisbury thus retreated to Britain's long-standing position: the United States is free to offer friendly arbitration in a dispute that does not concern its national safety or sovereignty; but the United States has no basis to intervene coercively.

Cleveland's response to Salisbury came on December 17, 1895, by way of a special message to Congress.[383] It repeated the arguments of Olney's memo while clarifying the administration's view of its right of interference. Cleveland concedes that the Monroe Doctrine is a distinctly American doctrine for the peace and security of the nation and that no national

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[381] According to Salisbury, the point of the Monroe Doctrine was to serve as an injunction of mutual non-interference—one that Britain had long supported and whose navy had effectively enforced for decades. Salisbury argued that not any legal basis for unilateral interference that denies other states their rightful functions. In effect, Salisbury accused Washington of attempting to sanctify illegal interference in the cloak of tradition and law. See Lord Salisbury, British Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Sir Julian Pauncefote, British Ambassador in Washington, November 26, 1895, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1895, 567–576.

[382] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1895, 575. "The Government of the United States is not entitled to affirm as a universal proposition, with reference to a number of independent States for whose conduct it assumes no responsibility, that its interests are necessarily concerned in whatever may befall those States, simply because they are situated in the Western Hemisphere." *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1895, 566.

[383] Cleveland, "Special Message on the Venezuela Boundary Dispute, Washington, D.C., December 17, 1895," in *Addresses and Papers*, 378.

decree, due simply by its assertion, enjoys any claim over other states. The question, Cleveland argues, is not whether the Monroe Doctrine is a categorical part of international law, but whether any specific application of it is consistent with the rights of the United States under international law.[384] The Monroe Doctrine is simply a particular, American version of the rights of every nation enjoys: namely, that no nation may extend its territory without right, and "that every nation shall have its rights protected and its just claims enforced." Like any claim of right, its application must be judged according to the merits of its appeal in a given circumstance or proceeding. The present appeal is merited, said Cleveland, because the dispute between Venezuela and Britain is over whether Britain is extending "her possessions on this continent without right," and therefore imperiling American security as understood by the Monroe Doctrine.[385]

Like Olney's national-security rationale, Cleveland's argument that potential territorial acquisition in Venezuela presents a threat to American security relied on a nebulous conception of deterrence. As critics would point out, he did not include an explanation for why, as a practical matter in this specific case, the security of the United States depends on an in-

[384] "Practically the principle for which we contend has peculiar, if not exclusive, relation to the United States. It may not have been admitted in so many words to the code of international law, but since in international councils every nation is entitled to the rights belonging to it, if the enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine is something we may justly claim it has its place in the code of international law as certainly and as securely as if it were specifically mentioned; and when the United States is a suitor before the high tribunal that administers international law the question to be determined is whether or not we present claims which the justice of that code of law can find to be right and valid." Cleveland, 377.
[385] Cleveland, 379.

vestigation of British claims in Venezuela. Thus, Cleveland's defense of the Monroe Doctrine raises the same question that bedeviled Olney's memo. As the political scientist Brian Loveman asks: "if the Monroe Doctrine were merely the 'right of self-defense,' what did it have to do with a boundary dispute between Venezuela and England over a colony in northern South America?"[386]

However, like Olney's memo, Cleveland's message is not "merely" a dubious justification of self-defense or simply "an emphatic definition of the Monroe Doctrine as a doctrine of self-interest," as LaFeber describes it.[387] In fact, in terms even more explicit than his top diplomat's, Cleveland argues that the United States cannot countenance an ignoble peace based on the resulting dynamics of a raw power disparity. "Considering the disparity in strength of Great Britain and Venezuela the territorial dispute between them can be reasonably settled only by friendly and impartial arbitration," he says. As in the case of Hawaii, Cleveland argues that the small power (then Hawaii, now Venezuela) deserves to have its claims heard, and he expresses disappointment that the great power (then the United States, now England) has failed to publicly prove its commitment to the justice of an international tribunal:

> It is deeply disappointing that such an appeal, actuated by the most friendly feelings toward both nations directly concerned, addressed to the sense of justice and to the

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[386] Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere Since 1776*, 159. Similarly, LaFeber says that "Cleveland's declaration is significant...because it emphasized and amplified Olney's crucial point that the United States was becoming involved in the controversy not for the sake of Venezuela, but for the welfare of the United States." LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 267.

[387] LaFeber, 268.

> magnanimity of one of the great powers of the world, and touching its relations to one comparatively weak and small, should have produced no better results.

As another great power, the United States is now presented with her own test of whether it will peacefully submit to England's assertion and strength, or whether it will insist (by arbitration or by force) on an investigation of the underlying facts. Cleveland stated his decision with no room for ambiguity:

> In making these recommendations I am fully alive to the responsibility incurred and keenly realize all the consequences that may follow.
>
> I am, nevertheless, firm in my conviction that while it is a grievous thing to contemplate the two great English-speaking peoples of the world as being otherwise than friendly competitors in the onward march of civilization and strenuous and worthy rivals in all the arts of peace, there is no calamity which a great nation can invite which equals that which follows a supine submission to wrong and injustice and the consequent loss of national self-respect and honor, beneath which are shielded and defended a people's safety and greatness.[388]

Even if Cleveland's ultimatum made his speech one his most "truculent" (as Alyn Brodsky describes it) or "among the most crudely assertive ever issued by responsible American statesmen" (as Nelson M. Blake puts it), it undoubtedly shared the weakness of Olney's memo in failing to provide a prudential argument that American intervention was a matter of urgent necessity.[389] That weakness, combined with his stunningly direct threat of war, provoked newfound leeriness among Cleveland's foes and friends alike. "The message of the President was ill-advised," said Republican Senator Edward O. Wolcott of Colorado, noting

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[388] Cleveland, 381.

[389] Brodsky, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Character*, 372. Nelson M Blake, "Background of Cleveland's Venezuelan Policy," *The American Historical Review* 47, no. 2 (1942), 259.

that it "glowed with the possibilities of war." The belligerency was no way to conduct diplomacy and only made the situation more untenable. "No dangers threatened us without. We are menaced by no foreign foe," said Wolcott.[390] While some historians would later describe Cleveland's gamesmanship as a ridiculous bluff, James Ford Rhodes, a historian and early supporter of Cleveland, noted that few dismissed Cleveland's strong words at the time. "That war was possible, even probable, as a result of the President's ultimatum to England, was the belief of most thoughtful men."[391]

Writing to the postmaster general, John Bassett Moore, Cleveland's otherwise loyal supporter and an intellectual authority on international law, said that Cleveland was justifying an interventionist policy on the basis of a doctrine whose purpose was to *prevent* interventionism. As Moore explained, the Monroe Doctrine was an extension of Washington's exhortation to remain neutral in external disputes as a means of safeguarding American liberty and security.[392] Cleveland, Moore argued, was twisting the principle into one that conferred on the United States a legal right and even obligation to assume a role as an (ostensibly) impartial judge because of a power disparity.[393] Moore sympathized with Cleveland's concern for justice. Still, he worried that the President's announcement would set a precedent for "our participation in numberless quarrels," with outcomes that would launch the

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[390] "The Fifty-Fourth Congress: The Senate Deals with Foreign Relations." *Los Angeles Herald*, January 23, 1896.
[391] J.F. Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the McKinley-Bryan Campaign of 1896* (Macmillan, 1920), 448.
[392] John Bassett Moore, *The Collected Papers of John Bassett Moore, Vol 7* (Yale University Press, 1944), 209.
[393] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 184–186.

country "on a career as mad and as fatal as that on which France was started by Louis XIV."[394]

Moore's protests may not have reached the President directly, but Cleveland did not need to read them to recognize that many were questioning his judgment. Senators of both parties were expressing concern that "this country is embarking upon a new and different policy from the one laid down by our fathers."[395] The ordinarily imperialist and anti-British newspapers accused Cleveland of gratuitously inviting British enmity over a relatively minor matter.[396] The psychologist William James wrote that the belligerent "moral ponderosity" of Cleveland's address was "the biggest political crime I have ever seen."[397] Upon reading his address, even Cleveland's own ambassador in London, Thomas Bayard, expressed confusion and bewilderment. Bayard had come to London with orders to press Britain on her behavior in Venezuela; he, like Cleveland, believed that the moment for such engagement was right.[398] However, Bayard, a congenital Anglophile, did not share Cleveland's willingness to

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[394] Quoted in McElroy, 186. See also Moore, *The Collected Papers of John Bassett Moore, Vol 7*, 209–212.
[395] "The Fifty-Fourth Congress: The Senate Deals with Foreign Relations." *Los Angeles Herald*, January 23, 1896; United States Congress, *United States Congressional Serial Set, Vol 2514* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1888), 47–48.
[396] May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power*, 2. See also Lodge to Roosevelt, August 10, 1895, in Henry Cabot Lodge and Charles F. Redmond, eds. *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884–1918* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971).
[397] William James, *The Letters of William James*. Vol. 1. Little, Brown (1920), 31.
[398] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 179. Bayard had also shared Olney and Cleveland's worry that Britain could very well penetrate the American homeland, perhaps even directly. In January 1896, he said he feared "that there was an indefinite plan of British occupation in the heart of America." Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, 644.

dare Britain to war—especially over a "mongrel state" (as he referred to Venezuela, in a separate letter, to the banker William Putnam).[399] He wrote to Cleveland: "I am not able to shake off a grave sense of apprehension in allowing the interests and welfare of our Country to be imperilled or complicated by such a government and people as those of Venezuela."[400]

At least for a moment, then, Cleveland's application of the Monroe Doctrine—which elevated American stakes far beyond what any well-defined concern for American security dictated—had led British officials, his domestic allies, the non-imperialist press, and his ambassador in London puzzled. Was Cleveland allowing a naïve sympathy with Venezuela overwhelm his scruples? Was he ingratiating himself with jingo or business interests of the day for domestic purposes? Was he engaged in a design akin to what he warned against in the case of Hawaii—using a dubious pretext "mainly to establish its influence in the region," as Zakaria put it?[401]

Like Olney, Cleveland was sensitive to the confusion provoked by the policy and its justifications. Also like Olney, Cleveland did not hesitate to clarify his motives—to his ministers and the public, both during and after his presidency.

Cleveland repeatedly denied that he was taking up the cause of Venezuela due to any altruistic motives. In his private response to Bayard (December 29, 1895), Cleveland wrote that his natural sympathy for a beleaguered state does not constitute a major motive for the

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[399] Charles Callan Tansill, *The Foreign Policy of Thomas F. Bayard, 1885-1897* (Fordham University Press, 1940), 748.
[400] Mr. Bayard to Mr. Cleveland, December 18, 1895, in McElroy, 191.
[401] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, 152.

policy. He said he is fully aware that the Monroe Doctrine is not a charity house; the doctrine is to be maintained for its "value and importance *to our government and welfare*" (his emphasis).[402] Similarly, in his post-presidency reflections, Cleveland insists that "securing to a weak sister republic peace and justice" was a consideration but not one that determined his diplomatic decisions. In fact, Cleveland never challenged Bayard's point that the United States had little at stake in protecting Venezuela. Nor did Cleveland hold any illusions about Venezuela's less-than-angelic dictatorial government.[403] As in the case of Hawaii, Cleveland rejected the notion that the character of the regime's institutions should guide decisions of intervention, whether for or against. He said plainly that the United States has no legitimate basis to make judgments in external disputes by its evaluation of the contesting regimes.[404] Cleveland said he believed his arbitration policy was helping both nations, and, in a sense, especially Britain. As he explained to Bayard, Britain was acting beneath her greatness, questioning American goodwill while demonstrating to the world "intensely disappointing" obstinacy amid serious charges of wrongdoing.[405] He said his policy was one consistent with his long-established friendship with Britain, and was now providing her with an opportunity to publicly reclaim her good name in an open court, on the basis of arguments whose existence

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[402] Emphasis in original. Quoted in McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 193. Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, 256.
[403] Hamilton, *President McKinley, War and Empire*, 135.
[404] Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, 253–279.
[405] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 194.

she had long-asserted but for which she had never brought evidence.[406] Still, Cleveland insisted that he harbors no prejudice regarding a final settlement and that his policy was not meant primarily to either help or harm either involved party.

If altruism was not a primary motive, was it a matter of political self-interest? Cleveland, to be sure, was facing domestic challenges at the time. Following the 1893 economic depression, the Democrats endured heavy losses in the 1894 congressional elections. Outspoken Republicans such as Lodge and Roosevelt criticized the President for his timidity in foreign affairs.[407] Many Republicans, and some Democrats, also harbored deep suspicions about British moves in Latin America.[408] In other words, the President, constrained by a tide of jingoism in Congress and throughout the nation, had good political reasons to co-opt the foreign policy issue and turn it into a domestic victory.[409] However, such an interpretation ignores the strong voices of anti-jingoism, including from the Republicans, and thus begs the question of why Cleveland did not co-opt *them*.[410] In any case, for all of the supposed incentives that to posture as jingo, there is little evidence that Cleveland recognized or hoped to

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[406] Expansionist opponents of Cleveland had long believed that the President was excessively pro-British, not least from what they believed was his acquiescence to British efforts to use Hawaii as a cable landing. Trubowitz, *Defining the National Interest: Conflict and Change in American Foreign Policy*, 59.
[407] H.W. Brands, *The Reckless Decade: America in the 1890s* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 299.
[408] Eggert, *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman*, 198.
[409] Eggert, 198–246.
[410] "The Fifty-Fourth Congress: The Senate Deals With Foreign Relations." *Los Angeles Herald*, January 23, 1896.

outmaneuver Congress for his political benefit.[411] Cleveland had demonstrated his willingness to oppose imperialists during the Hawaii controversy, and there is a mountain of evidence that his Venezuela policy was *predictably* unpopular with many of his supporters and opponents.[412]

That said, we cannot dismiss the importance of public pressure generated by the campaign of William Lindsay Scruggs, a former American diplomat hired by Venezuela to lobby on its behalf.[413] According to Grenville and Young, Scruggs was the mastermind who "persuaded the President to adopt a more forceful attitude."[414] As the founder of what would later become the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper and then a diplomat (from 1872 to 1892) with posts in Columbia, China, and Venezuela, Scruggs may have been the most vocal and knowledgeable voices in favor of U.S. intervention.[415] According to historical depictions of his "immense propagandist venture," copies of Scruggs' pamphlet—*British Aggressions in Venezuela, or the Monroe Doctrine on Trial* (published October 1894)—were sent far and wide and had penetrated public discourse.[416] It was, not coincidentally, Scruggs' own home

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[411] As LaFeber explains, "No reliable proof exists that Cleveland hoped the Venezuelan episode would rebound to his personal political benefit." LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 280.

[412] "Cleveland actually alienated many of his strongest supporters, especially the eastern bankers who had once saved the gold reserve and who, at Cleveland's request, repeated the rescue operation shortly after the December message…. Cleveland obviously realized that such maneuvers did not win national elections." LaFeber, 278.

[413] Cleveland's early biographers never mention Scruggs.

[414] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 124.

[415] Grenville and Young, 132–133.

[416] William Lindsay Scruggs, *British Aggressions in Venezuela: Or, the Monroe Doctrine on Trial* (Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1895); Hamilton, *America's New Empire*, 130; Theodore D. Jervey, "William Lindsay Scruggs, a Forgotten Diplomat," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 27 (1867).

congressman, Leonidas F. Livingston, who introduced the February 22, 1895 resolution (unanimously approved and then signed by Cleveland) that endorsed the arbitration policy.[417] Scruggs was in periodic contact with both Cleveland and Olney for several months in late 1894 until May of 1895.[418]

For all of Scruggs' considerable influence, it would be inaccurate to portray him as the mastermind behind Cleveland's policy, which began, and evolved, independently of Scruggs' campaign. As newspapers accounts suggest, Bayard had been installed in London—before Scruggs was a lobbyist, and before many Americans knew about the issue—with orders to press London on the matter.[419] Furthermore, although it is sometimes portrayed otherwise, Scruggs' pamphlet did not innovate the argument that the Monroe Doctrine demands American intervention in the region. As Cleveland himself pointed out, that was how America's interest in the border dispute was justified for decades, since at least President Grant.[420] As a foremost expert on the border dispute who earnestly believed in the policy he

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[417] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 132–145.

[418] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 153.

[419] "Venezuela Boundary Dispute." *New York Times*, March 7, 1895; "England and Venezuela." *Washington Post*, March 15, 1895.

[420] Cleveland had noted that Chester A. Arthur's secretary of state, Frederick Theodore Frelinghuysen, had already beseeched Britain on the same grounds in 1884 when he wrote that "The moral position of the United States in these matters was well known through the enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine, but formal action in the direction applying that doctrine to a speculative case affecting Venezuela seemed to be inopportune, and I could not advise Venezuela to arouse a discussion of the point." See Mr. Frelinghuysen to Mr. Lowell, July 7, 1884, in United States Congress, *United States Congressional Serial Set, Vol 2514* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1888), 47–48. Cleveland refers to it in *Presidential Problems*, 232. Cleveland's December 1894 message to Congress called for an arbitration policy: "The boundary of British Guiana still remains in dispute between Great Britain and Venezuela. Believing that its early settlement on some just basis alike honorable to both parties is in the line of our established policy to remove from this hemisphere all causes of difference with powers beyond the sea, I shall renew the efforts heretofore made to bring about a restoration of diplomatic relations

was advancing, Scruggs was undoubtedly a helpful resource to Cleveland and Olney, both of whom mined his arguments for their own purposes. Still, as even Grenville and Young concede, the two statesmen were already predisposed to agree with him, and they filtered Scruggs' case discerningly; there is much that Scruggs argued that is utterly absent in Cleveland and Olney's case.[421] Scruggs was one voice—perhaps the most important and well-informed voice—in the public debate. However, there were others on the opposing side; John Bassett Moore, who was far closer to Cleveland and Olney, was one of them.[422] Scruggs was someone of great persuasive ability, but his influence was endogenous to the broader debate over Venezuela. In sum, Scruggs was specialist-turned-activist advancing tendentious arguments about a controversy in which the United States has expressed interest for decades and in which Cleveland had taken interest before Scruggs was hired by Venezuela. Like the Venezuelan government, it seems that Cleveland and Olney found in him a useful resource, and—as it turns out, also like the Venezuelan government—they jettisoned the poor soul mercilessly as soon as their agendas diverged.[423]

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between the disputants and to induce a reference to arbitration—a resort which Great Britain so conspicuously favors in principle and respects in practice and which is earnestly sought by her weaker adversary." Cleveland, Special Message to Congress, December 3, 1894, quoted in Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, 251.

[421] For example, in contrast to Cleveland, Scruggs had sought to evoke sympathy for Venezuela as "the most intelligent and progressive of all Latin America." Scruggs, *British Aggressions in Venezuela: Or, the Monroe Doctrine on Trial*, 30.

[422] John Bassett Moore, "The Monroe Doctrine, Its Origin and Meaning." *Evening Post (New York)*, May 4, 1895; Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 147.; Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1867-1907*.

[423] Scruggs himself suspected he was being used by the administration and expressed frustration that it was not pursuing the aggressive policy he had advocated. Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 155.

Some historians point to the final settlement between Britain and Venezuela, widely regarded as unfavorable to the South American regime, as evidence that Cleveland was cynically exploiting the controversy to expand American power—precisely the kind of cynical calculation that he had inveighed against during the Hawaii controversy.[424] What, then, of the claim that Cleveland had interposed his administration for the material, commercial, and strategic aggrandizement of American wealth and power?

Cleveland loathed the insinuation that his policy was decided according to an economic calculus. In *Presidential Problems*, he says his policy was agnostic to the worth of British Guiana, and levels the sharpest arraignment on critics who complained of financial losses due to his policy.[425] The "conceited and doggedly mistaken critics" failed to see that "the value of the lands in dispute, was of the least consequences to us."[426] Indeed, Cleveland did not dispute the charge that his policy resulted in a negative economic balance.[427] As with his criticism of Stevens in the Hawaiian issue, Cleveland expressed great disgust with a policy

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[424] Although Cleveland and Olney regarded the settlement as "just and fair," many historians today consider it to be an unmistakable victory for Britain. Grover Cleveland, "Fourth Annual Message (Second Term), December 7, 1896," in *Letters and Addresses of Grover Cleveland*, ed. Albert Ellery Bergh Unit Book Publishing Company, 1909); James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service*, 134; LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 278; Harry Joseph Sievers, *Benjamin Harrison: Hoosier Statesman* (American Political Biography Press, 1996), 264–274.

[425] Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, 278.

[426] Cleveland, 278.

[427] Business support for the Cleveland-Olney initiative was far from clear and unambiguous. Hamilton, *America's New Empire*, 140–149; LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 274. As *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle* put it in 1901, shortly before Cleveland's message on his Venezuela policy, he had spoken of the grave issues regarding public finances, and "the collapse which ensued...in the general markets was the least surprising incident of the whole affair." "President Cleveland on the Venezuela Episode (July 27, 1901)," in *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle, Vol 73* William B. Dana Company, 1901), 161. See also James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service*, 122.

based on personal or national acquisitiveness. He condemned the unpatriotic venality of those who viewed policy through their pocketbook. "The patriotism of such people traverses exclusively the pocket nerve. They are willing to tolerate the Monroe Doctrine, or any other patriotic principle, so long as it does not interfere with their plans, and are just as willing to cast it off when it becomes troublesome."[428]

Even if Cleveland's policy was contrary to commercial and business interests, was it not a way to prevent Britain from strategic expansion and to recognize, as LaFeber says, a "claim of American dominance in the Western Hemisphere"?[429] The tacit precognition imputed to Cleveland bears no resemblance to the President's articulated concerns. He (and Olney) revealed no design by which compelling Britain to impartial arbitration over British Guiana would set the table for a new era of American hemispheric hegemony, global preeminence, and commercial expansion.[430] Cleveland and Olney's argument that the maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine depended on the recognition that great powers cannot enlarge their claims unlawfully in the hemisphere was no great diplomatic innovation.[431] Not unreasonably, they pointed out that the purpose of the doctrine conceived of no practical distinctions between planting a new colony and advancing the frontier of an old colony.[432] Not only did

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[428] Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, 280.
[429] LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion*, *1860–1898*, 278.
[430] Cleveland certainly recognized that the territorial issue had commercial implications given its strategic importance. But it is unclear to what extent he tied that importance to America's commercial interests.
[431] Monroe's notion of preventive deterrence based on the idea that, once threats are observable, the national interest may already be irreparably harmed, was not extraordinary. Eggert, *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman*, 199.
[432] Congressional Record, 44th Congress, First Session, Vol. XXVIII, Washington, D.C. 1896, 1578.

Cleveland and Olney leave us no reason to believe that they defined this national interest in grand commercial and strategic terms, but, given that so much of the criticism leveled on them was that their application of the Monroe Doctrine was *not* a persuasive argument for a national interest in the border dispute, it is unclear why they would be coy about their strategic cunning.

Cleveland never hesitated to remind his audience that invoking the doctrine as a justification for American interest in the border dispute was an American diplomatic tradition.[433] Privately, he suggested he did not share the diplomatic concern with the doctrine's finer points.[434] Insofar as champions of American supremacy (like Lodge and Roosevelt) sought to seize the controversy as a basis to expand the purpose of the Monroe Doctrine,[435] Cleveland expressed his anguished frustration.[436] Cleveland and Olney had every opportunity to embrace the expansive interpretation of their policy. At one point, they joined some of their own policy's Democratic detractors in opposing a Senate resolution, proposed by Republican Cushman K. Davis of Minnesota, that would give the Monroe Doctrine congres-

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[433] Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*.

[434] Writing to Bayard, he said he was
quite willing if possible within the limits of inexorable duty, to escape its serious contemplation." McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 192. Olney, too, seemed to view the Monroe Doctrine as something ancillary to the more important principle. Eggert, *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman*, 202–204, 210.

[435] See, for example, Henry Cabot Lodge, "England, Venezuela, and the Monroe Doctrine," *The North American Review* 160, no. 463, 1895, 65–58.

[436] Cleveland to Bissell, September 16, 1900, in McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 294.

sional sanction and establish a United States protectorate over all of South America. Cleveland rejected it and called it an assault on the principle of arbitration that had guided his policy.[437] "I regard the Davis resolution as mischievous, inopportune and unfortunate," Cleveland said.[438] Late in the controversy, his administration remained open to disengaging from the dispute and allowing bilateral negotiations between Britain and Venezuela to proceed. Those options were closed off only when it was determined that American arbitration was necessary to force Britain to agree on open negotiations with Venezuela.[439] In sum, Cleveland has left us with little basis to conclude that he was using the Monroe Doctrine or his policy as a pretext to assert America's hemispheric dominance.

Cleveland and Olney did see American intervention as helping to establish preeminence—but not, it seems, the narrowly-defined, strategic preeminence so often attributed to their policy. Both spoke of the policy as more a burden of responsibility than a prize of opportunity. For Olney, the United States could not simply limit itself to "self-preservation" or

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[437] For text of the resolution and response of Senator Newton C. Blanchard (Louisiana), see Congressional Record, 44th Congress, First Session, Vol. XXVIII, Washington, D.C. 1896, 1157–1581.
[438] "The Fifty-Fourth Congress: The Senate Deals with Foreign Relations." *Los Angeles Herald*, January 23, 1896. The same news report says Olney "expressed his disapproval of the action of the senate committee."
[439] Olney rejected bilateral negotiations only because Britain had signaled its refusal to negotiate without preconditions on the very territorial claims that were at the heart of the issue. (James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service*, 129–130.) In other words, neither Olney nor Cleveland spoke of it as a dispute about "who would define the Monroe Doctrine and who would control one of the continent's great commercial waterways," as LaFeber claims. LaFeber, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations: Volume 2: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865–1913*, 118.

the pursuit of "material interests."[440] "It is not enough for it to vaunt its greatness and superiority and to call upon the rest of the world to admire and be duly impressed." Olney said the isolationism of his day was irresponsible and dishonorable. "A shirking of the responsibilities of high place and great power is simply ignominious," he said in 1898.[441] Olney added that for the nation to live up to its power, "it behooves it to accept the commanding position belonging to it, with all its advantages on the one hand and all its burdens on the other."[442] By setting an admirable example of commitment to peaceful settlements, the United States is "sure to have the most important and beneficent influence upon the destinies of mankind."[443]

Similarly, in his final words in *Presidential Problems*, Cleveland proudly cites the Venezuelan controversy as bringing out the large mass of citizens' "sublime patriotism and devotion to their nation's honor." In contrast to those who followed their selfish interests and departed from principle when the principle became troublesome, these honorable countrymen demonstrated that "the integrity of their country" was a prize worthy of "the chances and suffering of conflict." He concluded:

> I hope there are but few of our fellow-citizens who, in retrospect, do not now acknowledge the good that has come to our nation through this episode in our history. It has established the Monroe Doctrine on lasting foundations before the eyes of the world; it has given us a better place in the respect and consideration of the

[440] Olney, "International Isolation of the United States (Address Delivered at Sanders Theatre, Harvard College, March 2, 1898)," 1–2.
[441] Olney, 11.
[442] Olney, 11.
[443] Olney, 12.

> people of all nations, and especially of Great Britain; it has again confirmed our confidence in the overwhelming prevalence among our citizens of disinterested devotion to American honor; and last, but by no means least, it has taught us where to look in the ranks of our countrymen for the best patriotism.[444]

Deterrence is a policy of national security and relative power. Yet Cleveland could say that his intervention in the dispute was "disinterested devotion to American honor." As he and Olney had argued throughout the controversy, the national interest in this case was inseparable from America's willful preservation of the prohibition against aggression sanctioned by international law—a supreme protector of all just nations.

We can summarize Cleveland's policy toward the Anglo-Venezuelan border dispute by describing it as both a continuation and a departure from American policy. Following a tradition dating back to at least President Abraham Lincoln, Cleveland expressed a national interest in offering Washington's aid to settle the British Guiana dispute. Following a tradition dating back to at least President Grant, Cleveland had invoked the Monroe Doctrine as a relevant pretext of America's interest in seeing the dispute settled. Cleveland's departure from tradition was in demonstrating unprecedented determination to refuse to permit England to strategically procrastinate, and in elevating the national stakes to a level that forced England to choose between arbitration and war. He and Olney described the situation in Venezuela as a challenge to America's commitment to international law in the hemisphere. They articulated a national interest in deterring international injustice—even when the injustice does

[444] Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, 280–281.

not directly affect American security and fortunes—because the alternative would amount to "supine submission to wrong and injustice." Should Venezuela's claims of violated sovereign rights go unheard, then Britain would vindicate the pernicious principle that international law has no earthly power over nations, and that strong powers can simply assert their advantage.

The Cleveland administration's case for their interventionist policy was not flawless. It is fair to point out that Cleveland never explained precisely how this external dispute imperiled American security. It is also fair to join their domestic critics who doubted their judgment in introducing the nation to new risks disproportionate to the nation's interest in the affair.[445] Finally, it is fair to wonder whether Cleveland and Olney do not, to some extent, deserve their misunderstanding, for their position on the matter was a somewhat convoluted effort to situate an accepted national principle of strategic deterrence in what they viewed to be a kind of architectonic principle of moral deterrence.

While such criticisms and doubts are fair, it is not fair to imply that the administration's case for intervention was reducible to addressing a short-term security emergency or a long-term strategic calculus. The combination of British obstinacy and Venezuelan entreaties forced his government "to assert and vindicate a principle distinctively American" by posing a question about whether fresh colonization was undertaken by the brute force of Britain. As

[445] There is reason to believe that, had Britain refused arbitration, she would have forcibly extended her territory and forced the government's hand to become allied with a government that did not enjoy Washington's confidence. James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service*, 138.

he explained, "we need proof of the limits of [Britain's] rights in order to determine our duty in defense of our Monroe Doctrine; and we sought to obtain such proof, and to secure peace, through arbitration."[446] With immutable purpose, Cleveland argued for a policy based on protecting the United States from the ignominious fate of enabling, through inaction, an incorrigible international depravity. He regarded the controversy as a representation of a broader America's right, interest, and duty to protect the legal authority sanctifying a just order that serves to protect every sovereign state.

THE CUBAN REBELLION (1895–1897)

Scholars often describe the Spanish-American War as a tragic inevitability—an "unwanted war" that was driven less by the decisions of statesmen than by accumulating underlying dynamics. In 1823, John Quincy Adams said it was "Scarcely possible to resist the conviction that the annexation of Cuba…will be indispensable to the continuance and integrity of the union itself."[447] Decades later, an industrializing, post-Civil War economy and a growing federal government with a new, powerful navy put Adams' prophecy within reach.[448] Meanwhile, the growing influence of progressivism and Social Darwinism was instilling new hopes of social engineering at home and abroad. With a shuffling of partisan

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[446] Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, 279–280.
[447] John Quincy Adams to Hugh Nelson, April 28, 1823. Quoted in Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 179.
[448] "[T]he United States might not have gone to war with Spain in 1898, and therefore would not have acquired a colony in the Philippines, had it not possessed a navy deemed capable of readily accomplishing those tasks." Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2006), 356.

alignments and the emergence of populist figures like William Jennings Bryan, an especially turbulent political period brought new incentives for the new Republican majority to co-opt foreign policy from the Democrats.[449] Given these strong compulsions, it is comprehensible that the United States would part ways from a tradition of neutrality, exploit the Cuban rebellion, and go to war with Spain on a novel and expanded understanding of America's global responsibilities.

It is also understandable why, in this context, Cleveland's role during the Cuban problem is depicted as an insignificant prelude to the confrontation with Spain in April of 1898, when McKinley and a supportive Congress began executing a far-reaching war effort.[450] According to Zakaria, it was incidental and transient circumstances that made possible Cleveland's necessarily temporary resistance to war: The country was distracted by a recession at home, Spain's intermittent concessions sustained hopes for a diplomatic resolution, the United States was taking a wait-and-see attitude toward other European powers.[451]

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[449] Ceaser, "The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism"; McCartney, *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism*; J.L. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014), chapter 2.

[450] Robert L Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New: 1865-1900* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1986); David Healy, *US Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2011); LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*; May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power*; Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*; Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*.

[451] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, chapter 5.

Given these factors, Cleveland's resistance, based on a "quaint" vision of a "modest republic," was feckless, and predictably so.[452]

Lest we forget, between February 24, 1895 (when the rebellion in Cuba ignited), until March 4, 1897 (when he transferred the reins to McKinley), Cleveland was the chief executive with all of the constitutionally-conferred discretions of the office. In those 739 days, Cleveland exercised these powers to oppose, with methodical purpose, the public and political tide calling for intervention, even as his diplomatic efforts toward pacification met Spanish resistance. Throughout his retirement, Cleveland insisted that, were he in his successor's position, he would not have gone to war with Spain.

As far as we accept the deterministic accounts for the war of 1898 as comprehensive causal explanations, we risk underplaying Cleveland's intentions as insignificant, overlooking his strident, reasoned, and well-articulated opposition to intervention. As I will argue, Cleveland's steadfast commitment to neutrality was consistent with his notions of international justice and national duty that he had maintained in earlier controversies. He believed America's highest interest in the dispute was pacification and that this interest must be pursued according to America's legal obligation to yield to Spain's sovereign rights.

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[452] As McDougall puts it, "Cleveland's vision of the United States as a modest republic seems quaint in retrospect only because we know what happened in 1898 and all the reasons why an American grasp for world power seems overdetermined." McDougall, *The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy: How America's Civil Religion Betrayed the National Interest*, chapter 10; L.L. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Regents Press of Kansas, 1980), 63. In his retirement, Cleveland wrote to an acquaintance: "My beliefs and opinions are unsuited to the times." McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 277–278.

The Context

For Cubans, the rebellion that they started in 1895 was, in a sense, a continuation of a war of independence against Spain they had been waging in one form or another since 1868, when the Ten Years War began. Spain's goals throughout those years were to secure the most important remaining possession in the Western Hemisphere. When that war concluded (260,000 lives later), Spain could claim victory only by promising that she would undertake reforms of an island government that was run by wealthy officials' *ad hoc* decrees. The promised political reforms proved insufficient or elusive. Troubles compounded once Congress's 1894 tariff reform raised imported sugar prices to protect domestic growers and Cuba was no longer a sugar-exporting powerhouse. The resulting economic stagnation and widespread poverty revived new hopes for large-scale political change that would remove the yolk of a feckless and corrupt Spanish ruling elite.[453] To that end, rebels took arms against Spanish colonial administration and virtually all economic infrastructure on the island, including sugar plantations. General Maximo Gomez, a Cuban leader of the Ten Years War, decided that the lesson of the previous struggle was that an insurgency could only succeed if it defies the boundaries of conventional warfare and employs "a strategy of destroying the Cuban economy to persuade the Spanish to leave."[454]

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[453] "Periodic economic depressions had sharpened American awareness of the importance of foreign markets to secure national prosperity. Sugar dominated American interests in Cuba…" Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 14.

[454] "Periodic economic depressions had sharpened American awareness of the importance of foreign markets to secure national prosperity. Sugar dominated American interests in Cuba…" Offner, 5.

Spain feared that the rebellion would endanger its broader colonial authority and became increasingly convinced that the only solution to its problem was to choke the rebellion in its crib. In 1896, the new Spanish governor of the island, General Valeriano Weyler, directed a grisly reconcentration policy which effectively imprisoned the country's peasants in urban centers, forcing about 400,000 Cubans to choose death by disease or the sword. In response, the Cuban insurgents burned homes, destroyed plantations, and executed compatriots unsympathetic to their cause.[455]

Leery of American annexation yet nevertheless desperate for aid, the rebels appealed for American support that would help their footing against well-armed Spanish soldiers. The rebels calculated that the United States, due to moral and historical sympathy, economic interest, and strategic opposition to the Spanish empire, would support their efforts.[456] To that end, the Cubans set up an aggressive propaganda effort. According to the conventional historical narrative, Americans were sympathetic to the freedom-fighting message of the Cubans and suspicious of Spanish intentions, especially after Spain courted the support of European powers. The Monroe Doctrine lent credence to the argument that a struggling European empire should not force its dominion in the hemisphere.[457] In the meantime, the newspaper industry acted as a conduit of propaganda, engaging in competitive sensationalist campaigns

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[455] Despite their brutal tactics, the Cubans enjoyed the support of the majority of the island's inhabitants. Charles S. Campbell, *The Transformation of American Foreign Policy: 1865–1900* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 242.

[456] Between January and April 1896, Congress debated and passed a concurrent resolution to recognition to the Cuban belligerency. Absent executive support, such resolutions would prove to be symbolic gestures.

[457] Hamilton, *President McKinley, War and Empire*, Vol I, 109.

about Spanish atrocities and Cuban heroism that avoided assiduously any standard of impartiality. Politicians had self-serving reasons to join the chorus, and many Democrats joined with Republicans to call for American intervention by way of official recognition of the belligerents. At the outset of the rebellion, even Olney expressed sympathy for the Cuban cause.[458]

Several months after an overwhelmingly Republican Congress was seated (in December 1895), members in both chambers resolved to reverse its previous policy of neutrality, calling on the President to grant the rebels official recognition—a gesture which would have enabled the United States to support them with materials without committing to direct military confrontation. Cleveland was facing public hostility, especially from the South and West, and Olney warned Cleveland that American "politicians of all stripes, including Congressmen," were "setting their sails, or preparing to set them, so as to catch the popular breeze," which of course blew toward support of the Cuban rebels.[459] As Ambassador Bayard wryly noted, Congress seemed "strangely inclined to reverse the order of the Constitution, and . . . send messages and information to the Executive not to receive them from him."[460] That message: Congress is running out of patience with Cleveland's passivity. Senator John Sherman, Republican of Ohio, and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, gave a

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[458] Olney eventually, during the winter months of 1895, came to an anti-Cuban posture due to the destruction caused by the insurgents and his worry that Cuban independence would lead to a civil war on the island. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 64; Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 187.
[459] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 246.
[460] McElroy, 247.

rousing speech arguing that it is about time "to put an end to crimes…almost beyond description."[461] By February 1896, the Senate demanded that the President abandon neutrality and support the Cuban insurgents. In April, both chambers passed a concurrent resolution recognizing Cuban belligerency and calling on the President to find peace through Cuban independence.[462]

As Cleveland prepared his first annual message since the start of the conflict, Daniel E. Sickles, a retired ambassador to Spain, offered the President free advice. "Our independence was founded on the right of insurrection," he noted. Now that the Cuban cause "has already won the admiration and sympathy of our people," it is the President's turn to pass the test. "I hope...that the President, in his annual message, may recognize the claims of this struggle for freedom upon the attention of our government."[463]

Cleveland's Case Against Intervention in Cuba

Cleveland did not heed Sickles' advice to take up the righteous cause. Even as he was pilloried by members of both parties, his administration's private and public statements on the matter (including his final two annual messages, in December 1895 and December 1896) conveyed his strong determination in favor of a policy of neutral non-interference. This was a policy grounded in Cleveland's reasoned convictions rather than idle passivity or

[461] Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 19.
[462] However, this was not a joint resolution, and was therefore largely a symbolic gesture.
[463] Sickles to Olney, November 26, 1895, quoted in Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895–1902*, 170.

strategic delay. Cleveland, as ever, believed that the United States was compelled to pursue its primary interests within the confines of international law, even—or especially—when such obedience is threatened by well-meaning, though ultimately misguided, temptations.

Cleveland developed his policy while acknowledging the relevance of economic, strategic, and humanitarian considerations. He recognized that the conflict in Cuba was devastating American property holders and foreshadowing a bleak future for American trade on the island.[464] He also understood that sugar interests were unenthusiastic about the prospect of a Cuban republic regulating their entrenched investments on the island.[465] The rebels had laid waste to plantations and reduced the sugar crop to a fraction of its previous size.[466] There was little reason to trust that a rebel victory would result in a civilian government that would reestablish the kind of commercial friendliness enjoyed under Spanish rule.[467]

Cleveland also held suspicions about whether an insurgent victory would redound to the benefit of America's interest in stability and prosperity.[468] Unlike many proponents of American intervention, he and Olney did not ignore the gulf between insurgents' noble goals and their maltreatment of an island they claimed to love. In destroying property and economic infrastructure, the rebels were demonstrating their disregard for their compatriots'

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[464] Cleveland and Olney believed injury to American commerce could not justify intervention and was at most of secondary importance. Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 190; Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 380.
[465] Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, 714; Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 190.
[466] Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, 714.
[467] Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 541.
[468] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, chapter 7.

long-term well-being. Cleveland conveyed such apprehensions in a context of a broader public debate with strong racial elements, with opponents of Cuban independence expressing skepticism that the Creole population and Catholic faith on the island was a good recipe for republicanism.[469]

At the same time, Cleveland held no illusions about the pernicious incompetence and corruption of Spanish rule in Cuba. In his final years in office, the colonial administration had provided little reason to trust that its reestablished rule would resolve deep-seated problems on the island. Cleveland's final congressional messages suggest that he sympathized with the Cuban rebellion insofar as it was animated by grievances against Spain's long list of broken promises and recent military brutality. Nevertheless, he was circumspect about highlighting such facts. In the summer of 1896, he conceded the very real humanitarian outrages but expressed concern that emphasizing them would inflame an already volatile public at the cost of his policy objectives.[470]

Cleveland stated these policy objectives forthrightly: The nation's foremost interest was a conclusion of violent hostilities, so that "order and quiet restored to the distracted island, bringing in their train the activity and thrift of peaceful pursuits."[471] Cleveland justified

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[469] Meanwhile, proponents of American intervention held a paternalistic attitude that republicanism would civilize a benighted island. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 4.

[470] Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, 716–717.

[471] He also understood the dangers in instability so close to American shores, not least because of the prospect that other powers will exploit the chaos to their advantage. Grover Cleveland, "Third Annual Message (Second Presidential Term), Washington, D.C., December 2, 1895," in *Letters and Addresses of Grover Cleveland*, ed. Albert Ellery Bergh Unit Book Publishing Company, 1909).

his policy of neutrality as one that treats all ancillary concerns—humanitarian, commercial, and political—as subservient to the government's honest fulfillment of "every international obligation":

> Though neither the warmth of our people's sympathy with the Cuban insurgents, nor our loss and material damage consequent upon the futile endeavors thus far made to restore peace and order, nor any shock our humane sensibilities may have received from the cruelties which appear to especially characterize this sanguinary and fiercely conducted war, have in the least shaken the determination of the Government to honestly fulfill every international obligation, yet it is to be earnestly hoped on every ground that the devastation of armed conflict may speedily be stayed and order and quiet restored to the distracted island, bringing in their train the activity and thrift of peaceful pursuits.[472]

In assessing his predicament, the most prominent of Cleveland's many worries was that neither side was winning decisively. "If Spain has not yet reestablished her authority, neither have the insurgents yet made good their title to be regarded as an independent state," he lamented in his December 1896 statement.[473] America's hardheaded interest in quiet and order meant that it must accept (if not welcome) even brutal Spanish asphyxiation of the Cubans. In other words, Cleveland spoke negatively less of Spanish crimes than Spanish failure to successfully pacify the country. Olney, meanwhile, privately praised Spain for not repeating its slow-burn strategy of the Ten Years War and expressed regret of Spain's tactics of overwhelming force—but only because it has proven *unsuccessful* in suppressing the chaos.[474]

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[472] Cleveland, 375.
[473] Cleveland, 385.
[474] See Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 541–542.

The administration's sober, if not outright chilly, attitude toward the Cuban cause has led many scholars to follow Cleveland's critics and portray him as "siding" with Spain.[475] That was certainly not how Cleveland (or Madrid) understood things.[476] It is more accurate to say that whereas American supporters of the rebels sought peace on terms consistent with (in their minds, at least) the promotion of American republicanism, Cleveland repeatedly said that the pursuit of peace was, and must always be, constrained by "the recognized obligations of international relationship" with Spain, the only other sovereign power in the controversy. Although they are often portrayed as such, Cleveland's repeated invocations of America's obligation to Spanish sovereignty were not priggish rationalizations or perfunctory asides decorating a pro-Spain or anti-Cuban American policy. Above all, they represented the central guiding premise of his argument: namely, that the conflict in Cuba was an internal family affair between Spain and her children—not an interstate conflict between sovereign powers.[477]

Indeed, Cleveland's understanding of America's legal obligations to Spain emerged from the fact of Spain's presumed sovereignty and the nonexistence of any independent Cuban state. The rebels, he said, have no functional government. Their fly-by-night administration is a patchwork of paramilitary rule, where "the will of the military officer [is] in tempo-

[475] Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 64–66.
[476] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 193.
[477] Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 541.

rary command of a particular district," and a "putative Cuban government" that is so ineffectual it must be considered "a government merely on paper." Spain, in contrast, was still the only civil authority on the island, maintaining its functions "more or less imperfectly," especially in the larger towns and suburbs. As "imperfect and restricted as the Spanish government of the island may be, no other exists there," he said.[478] Thus, granting belligerent rights to the insurgents or formally acknowledging their cause of independence was a spurious legal gesture because it gave *de jure* legal status to an entity that had no *de facto* political existence. Christening Cuba with the respect of statehood was out of the question not merely because it was of dubious prudence but because the Cubans have no capacity to meet those obligations that "devolve upon every member of the family of nations."[479] For those who saw the success of the insurgent political movement to be America's highest objective, the legal formalities were merely diplomatic levers; for Cleveland, these were principles that constituted America's moral lodestar in all of its international affairs.

Cleveland believed that, since Spain was the only sovereign ruler and internationally responsible party in the conflict, the only diplomatic route was to pursue peace through appeal to Spain's own interests and conscience.[480] Cleveland made concerted efforts to encourage Spain to offer whatever concessions were consistent with her interests and dignity that

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[478] Cleveland, 386.

[479] Cleveland's administration took the same line in their private diplomatic efforts. Olney told his Spanish counterpart that recognition of the Cubans is out of the question until the insurrectionists have a stable government capable of executing obligations that "devolve upon every member of the family of nations." Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 541.

[480] Olney wrote that the United States is "entertaining no other purpose toward Spain than that of lending its assistance to such termination of a fratricidal contest as will leave her honor and dignity unimpaired at the same

might conciliate the rebels.[481] Spain consistently refused, making clear that its political control of Cuba was non-negotiable.[482] Some historians therefore regard Cleveland's Cuban policy as an abject failure—a naïve or unrealistic attempt to extract Spanish concessions that had no chance of coming, given the strength of Cuban nationalism.[483]

Cleveland's diplomacy, however flawed, was not a failure from his perspective. Given his commitment to the responsibilities to sovereign law, he had few available alternatives. His offer of friendly mediation was not a strategy designed in an abstract environment of cost-conscious strategic players seeking a peaceful equilibrium. It was an effort guided by deliberate, self-imposed moral constraints. In contrast to Venezuela, Cuba had no legal basis by which to sue Spain in an international tribunal. Revealingly, Cleveland reacted to Spanish obstinacy with disconsolation and disappointment rather than escalating gamesmanship or policy revisions. "I am thinking a great deal about Cuba," he wrote to Olney on July 13,

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time that it promotes and conserves the true interests of all parties concerned." Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 544.

[481] Cleveland explains his support for an arrangement that would broaden Cuban autonomy, thus enabling the Cubans "to test their capacity for self-government under the most favorable conditions," while preserving Spanish sovereignty. Such an arrangement "would appear to be in the true interest of all concerned." Cleveland, "Fourth Annual Message (Second Term), December 7, 1896." Similarly, Olney expressed the administration's hope that mediation between the United States and Spain would help Spain achieve pacification while keeping her sovereignty. Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 543.

[482] Spain said that there would be no discussion until the Cubans lay down their arms and submit to the mother country—that there "is no effectual way to pacify Cuba unless it begins with the actual submission of the armed rebels to the mother country." Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 543.

[483] "The Cleveland administration prevented war for two years, but it did so through policies of endorsing Spanish dominance and of opposing the rebels, which fewer and fewer American accepted." (Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 66.) For Welch, Cleveland's policy exhibited "tactical confusion." Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, 196. See also Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, chapter 7.

1896. "But am so far as ever from seeing the place where we can get in."[484] As long as Spain was immovable, American diplomacy was legally constrained to friendly appeals and entreaties. Any other alternative would demand open contempt for legal obligations—conduct that Cleveland repeatedly said was out of the question.

Cleveland believed that the only relevant and legitimate basis of coercive directives concerned Spain's legal duties to the United States. Throughout the conflict, diplomacy with Spain was consumed by citizen-protection cases, such as those involving the expulsion of journalists and damage to American sugar planters who sued Spain for compensation.[485] Despite ongoing controversies, Cleveland was compelled to say that Spain was fulfilling debt obligations to American citizens and engaging diplomatically over jailed Americans. In his annual message, he comes close to speaking on behalf of Spain, relaying Madrid's "full expression of regret" regarding charged incidents of maritime inference.[486] In short, Cleveland publicly acknowledged and believed (with reason) that Spain was behaving dutifully, sometimes admirably, as an international legal defendant toward the United States.

Yet when it came to America's duties to Spain, Cleveland conveyed consternation, bordering on shame and embarrassment. He repeatedly condemned American citizens and Cuban émigrés who departed American shores on volunteer, "filibustering" expeditions on

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[484] Quoted in Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, 715–716. Meanwhile, Cleveland made it clear to congressional leaders that he would rebuke them were they to try to pass a joint resolution directing the recognition of Cuban insurgents.
[485] Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 23–24.
[486] Cleveland, 375.

steamships and smaller crafts to arm the insurrectionists, thus compromising and contravening the federal policy of neutrality.[487] Cleveland never denied that the American sympathizers of Cubans were acting out of considerations of republicanism and—especially following the onset of Spain's brutal reconcentration policy—"considerations of philanthropy and humanity."[488] But he believed that such considerations must remain subservient to America's position as a legally conscientious member of the family of nations. In his July 1896 renewal of his neutrality proclamation, he admonished Americans "to abstain from taking part in such disturbances in contravention of the neutrality laws of the United States," promising to vigorously prosecute violators.[489] Cleveland's sweeping policy against filibusterers included a new federal apparatus that would monitor, intercept, and prosecute Americans who violated national policy. He approved new bases along America's southern coast to help the navy intercept civilian vessels headed toward Cuba, an enforcement policy far more effective than even Spain's patrol of Cuban harbors.[490] In his third annual message to Congress, he promised that his administration would "enforce obedience to our neutrality laws" and "prevent the territory of the United States from being abused as a vantage ground from which to aid

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[487] Cleveland also worried that the filibusterers would trigger an interstate conflict with Spain. McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 251.
[488] Cleveland, 386.
[489] Grover Cleveland, "Proclamation 387—continuing Neutrality of Citizens of the United States in the Civil Disturbance in Cuba: July 27, 1896." (1896): http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=70793.
[490] The United States ultimately intercepted 33 filibustering expeditions. By contrast, during the same period, Spain intercepted six. D.C. Peifer, *Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 30.

those in arms against Spanish sovereignty."[491] We note the wording here; Cleveland's anti-filibustering policy was purposed to maintain national conduct that is consistent with due regard for "Spanish sovereignty"—not necessarily Spanish victory over the rebels or any Spanish-American alliance.

There is no way to know if a more civil and politically promising insurgency, or a more powerful or pernicious colonial power than Spain, would have broken Cleveland's principled stance regarding American obligations toward Spanish sovereignty. What is clear is that Cleveland could have, but chose not to, ground his policy on the dictates of prudence and the multitude of risks in an insurgent victory. Instead, his primary arguments in favor of neutrality and against intervention were consistent with his long-held view that foreign policy intervention could not be justly determined by evaluation of contesting principles or institutions represented by the foreign parties. As wary as Cleveland may have been of the Cuban rebellion, and as tolerant as he may have been of Spanish power, Cleveland followed the same path he did in Hawaii and Venezuela, arguing that intervention can only be justified by the sovereign law of nations. The "plain duty" of the government, he said, is "to observe in good faith the recognized obligations of international relationship."[492] These duties included continuing to hold Spain accountable to its legal obligations and prosecuting Americans involved in compromising international law. The United States was an onlooker on a terrible

[491] Cleveland, "Third Annual Message (Second Presidential Term), Washington, D. C., December 2, 1895," 374.
[492] Cleveland, 374–5.

conflict, but, absent a threat to its sovereignty, it had no right to break the law by way of advancing trans-legal republican or humanitarian objectives, however righteously pursued.

Cleveland's arguments against intervention from 1895 to 1897 present a challenge to the deterministic scholarly narrative of the Spanish-American War. That narrative presents McKinley's decision in 1898 as the consummation of long-simmering dynamics—economic, cultural, political—preceding him, and which would have compelled Cleveland in a similar way, had the Democrat served a third term.[493] Some scholars go so far as to argue that the Cleveland administration took steps toward war. According to LaFeber, Cleveland and Olney "contributed to the causes for war in 1898; they emphasized the involvement of American interests and provided a rationale for the right to use force, if necessary, to protect these interests."[494] According to Zakaria, "By December 1896, Cleveland had shifted American policy toward intervention, even as he denied doing so."[495] Robert Beisner says that "The Spanish-American War turned out to be McKinley's War, not because Cleveland was an old-fashioned isolationist with a stiffer backbone than his successor, but because he left office just in time."[496] According to Margaret Leech, "Cleveland was convinced that war had become all but inevitable."[497]

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[493] Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, 713. For a contrasting view, see Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, 194; Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*; R.G. Tugwell, *The Enlargement of the Presidency* (Octagon Books, 1977).
[494] LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion*, *1860–1898*, 300.
[495] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, 153.
[496] Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New: 1865-1900*, 119.
[497] Margaret Leech, *In the Days of McKinley* (American Political Biography Press, 1999), 115.

It is true that Cleveland, late in his second term, began to articulate greater frustration with the stalemate in Cuba and of Spain's inability to contain the conflict. In his final annual statement to Congress, he made clear that peace is always conditional: "though the United States is not a nation to which peace is a necessity, it is in truth the most pacific of powers and desires nothing so much as to live in amity with all the world."[498] Then, in an oft-cited passage taken as evidence that he had expected a looming intervention, he adds:

> When the inability of Spain to deal successfully with the insurrection has become manifest and it is demonstrated that her sovereignty is extinct in Cuba for all purposes of its rightful existence, and when a hopeless struggle for its reestablishment has degenerated into a strife which means nothing more than the useless sacrifice of human life and the utter destruction of the very subject-matter of the conflict, a situation will be presented in which our obligations to the sovereignty of Spain will be superseded by higher obligations, which we can hardly hesitate to recognize and discharge.[499]

Referring to these words, Zakaria writes: "In his message to Congress, [Cleveland] declared that Spain had definitely lost control of the Cuban situation."[500] Similarly, Julius W. Pratt argues that Cleveland "intimated plainly that the United States could not see the struggle drag on indefinitely," and had admitted that war may be the only solution to the Cuban question.[501] Thus, we are led to believe that Cleveland, in late 1896, had lost faith in Spain's

[498] Cleveland, 387.
[499] Cleveland, 388.
[500] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, 153.
[501] Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands*, 12.

ability to control Cuba, had sent Madrid a final warning, and provided reassurance to Congress that intervention was coming. According to this reading, Cleveland was about to reach the same conclusion that McKinley did 16 months later.

Given that his address came amidst congressional attempts to recognize the belligerents and isolate the executive, they appear as reassurances to Congress that his patience toward Madrid is not unlimited.[502] Insofar as he emphasizes the conditional nature of his anti-intervention stance, these are foreboding words to Madrid. Some press reports at the time summarized Cleveland's address as "intimat[ing] that the warfare may reach such a stage as to require action by this government."[503]

However, we have reason to doubt an interpretation suggesting that Cleveland ended his address in proto-McKinleyian terms or with resignation toward an inevitable war with Spain. In the first place, we must contend with the fact that neither Madrid nor Congress interpreted Cleveland's message the way that contemporary scholars with the benefit of hindsight have. In fact, the Sagasta government was encouraged that it could continue their policy of strategic procrastination that adeptly took advantage of Cleveland's commitment to respecting Spain's sovereign authority.[504] Meanwhile, Congress perceived Cleveland's address

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[502] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 197.
[503] "Message to Congress." *Washington Post*, December 8, 1896.
[504] Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 66.

as a reaffirmation of his ongoing diplomatic efforts and refusal to pivot course and a signal that any war would be their exclusive responsibility.[505]

To understand why Cleveland's message left Madrid encouraged, and Congress dejected, it is necessary to return freshly to Cleveland's precise wording. We note that, Cleveland did *not* say that Spain "has lost control of the Cuban situation"—only that it may, in the future, lose control. The President said that *if* Spain does lose control, intervention *may* be necessary—depending on the "precise conditions" and "contingencies" of the time. Moreover, following his "higher obligations" remark, Cleveland proceeded to explain what he means by "conditions" and "contingencies" that may warrant intervention, in a passage that is curiously left out of most scholarly accounts that allude to Cleveland's terse warning:

> Deferring the choice of ways and methods until the time for action arrives, we should make them depend upon the precise conditions then existing; and they should not be determined upon without giving careful heed to every consideration involving our honor and interest or the international duty we owe to Spain. Until we face the contingencies suggested or the situation is by other incidents imperatively changed we should continue in the line of conduct heretofore pursued, thus in all circumstances exhibiting our obedience to the requirements of public law and our regard for the duty enjoined upon us by the position we occupy in the family of nations.
>
> A contemplation of emergencies that may arise should plainly lead us to avoid their creation, either through a careless disregard of present duty or even an undue stimulation and ill-timed expression of feeling. But I have deemed it not amiss to remind the Congress that a time may arrive when a correct policy and care for our interests, as well as a regard for the interests of other nations and their citizens, joined by considerations of humanity and a desire to see a rich and fertile country intimately related to us saved from complete devastation, will constrain our Government to such

[505] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 197; Nevins, Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage, 717.

> action as will subserve the interests thus involved and at the same time promise to Cuba and its inhabitants an opportunity to enjoy the blessings of peace.[506]

Crucially, Cleveland did not say—indeed, he explicitly denied—that the mere presence of ongoing humanitarian violations would eventually force him to undertake action.[507] In order for the United States to be permitted to act on behalf of humanitarian interests, Spain must first demonstrate not only that she has lost control of the island (which she had not), but also that she has no intention on regenerating her rule. Once such a scenario converges with compelling national interests (including threats of interference "by any other power"), the United States may rightfully intervene. In other words, neither Madrid nor Congress interpreted Cleveland's warning in the same way as contemporary scholars do because his warning was an explication of his long-standing, strikingly narrow conditions by which intervention in Cuba becomes legally legitimate and morally necessary. Short of meeting those conditions, Cleveland was promising a policy that remained "in the line of conduct heretofore pursued" and consistent with the "requirements of public law." There was no mystery about what Cleveland meant by that—it had become his signature foreign-policy justification.

Through his final days in office, Congress fought Cleveland's restrictive policy, hoping "that it might force the President's hand," as McElroy explains.[508] Cleveland had nevertheless succeeded in consistently guarding his executive discretion on the matter. He and

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[506] Cleveland, 388–9.

[507] This part of Cleveland's address typically receives less attention. See Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* ; Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895–1902*, vol. I, 203; L.A. Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires, 1878–1902* (University of Pittsburgh Pre, 2007), 72; Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U. S. Policy Toward Latin America*, 202.

[508] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 249.

Olney publicly promised that, were a resolution to pass that formally granted Cubans their independence, the executive branch would summarily disregard it.[509] In that late period, in a private meeting with members of Congress, the President was told a lawmaker: "we have about decided to declare war against Spain over the Cuban questions. Conditions are intolerable."[510] To this, Cleveland is said to have responded: "There will be no war with Spain over Cuba while I am president." After noting the costs of war and his (soon to be tarnished) hope to purchase the island, he added: "It would be an outrage to declare war."[511] Although this account may be apocryphal, it is consistent with Cleveland's forceful neutralization of congressional efforts to force his hand. Cleveland did not want Congress to declare war, but he also recognized that Congress did not want to declare war, either—at least not on terms that precluded genuine executive support.[512]

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509 Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, 198.

510 A.B. Farquhar and S. Crowther, *The First Million the Hardest: An Autobiography* (Doubleday, Page, 1922), 270.

511 Farquhar, 15.

512 Cleveland had successfully threatened the Senate with promise of excoriation, should they proceed to recognize the insurgents. In an August 1896 meeting, Cleveland reportedly asked the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations members why they did not recognize the belligerency of the insurgents if they thought it wise. As he told a friend, it was because they did not truly want the responsibility for themselves. It was a matter of debate among Senators whether, as a constitutional matter, a veto override would force the President to decide between executing the law or submitting him to impeachment. Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, 716.

Cleveland left the White House in 1897 with unflappable conviction that American intervention in Cuba remained illegal, conveying hopeful optimism that his Republican successor has the good character to stay the course.[513] Early in his retirement, he expressed confidence that war would be averted through patience and diplomatic entreaties.[514] When the *Maine* sank on February 15, 1898, and enthusiasm for war peaked, Cleveland lashed out at those who sought to use the tragedy as a pretext for American involvement.[515]

Cleveland denied that McKinley was forced to war, whether by events or mounting public pressure. In his view, an honorable policy of friendly mediation was deliberately abandoned by the leadership succeeding him, and he said that history would judge that departure poorly.[516] The ex-president believed that McKinley's decision to go to war over Cuba reflected a deficiency in self-restraint among both the leaders and citizens. McKinley and his ilk had yielded to righteous, yet foolhardy and unprincipled, temptations to act on behalf of humanity.[517] He believed that such intentions, however earnest, would be discredited, as we

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[513] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 251; Tugwell, The Enlargement of the Presidency, 250.

[514] Tugwell, *The Enlargement of the Presidency*, 250.

[515] He berated the *New York Journal* for exploiting the *Maine* episode, writing to journalist William Randolph Hearst: "I decline to allow my sorrow for those who died on the Maine to be perverted to the advertising scheme for the New York *Journal*." Quoted in Alfred Emanuel Smith, *New Outlook* (Outlook Publishing Company, 1898), 908.

[516] Allan Nevins, ed. *Letters of Grover Cleveland, 1850-1908. Selected and Edited by Allan Nevins* Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933), 497.; Gilder, *Grover Cleveland: A Record of Friendship*, 219–220.

[517] Cleveland had come to share the view of McKinley's critics, who saw the Republican as an easily-manipulated weak-kneed fool, ever-eager for public approval—a man of "amiable weakness not unmixed with political ambition," said Cleveland. But Cleveland's criticism of McKinley's policy went beyond *ad hominems*. Though he chided Roosevelt and others for holding cynical motives in advocating a "humanitarian" policy, he seemed to accept that McKinley and others like him were moved by largely righteous intentions "in the interest of humanity and civilization." "It seems to me to be the same old story of good intentions and motives sacrificed to

"will find ourselves in alliance and co-operation with Cuban insurgents the most inhuman and barbarous cutthroats in the world. I suppose the outrages to which we shall then be privy, and the starvation and suffering abetted by our interference will be mildly called the 'incidents of the war.'"[518] On June 21, 1898, a day before American troops landed in Cuba, the ex-president delivered a commencement address that said the war reflected a culture besotted by the promise of glory and a hubristic notion of civilizing reform.[519] There is no shortage of patriotic sentiments in the country and martial courage, he said. However, equally or more important to the "highest type of American citizenship" is "a constant steadiness of sound American judgment and an uncompromising ability among our citizens to resist temptation."[520] Privately, Cleveland divulged his bitter disappointment with America's entry into war with Spain. "I cannot avoid a feeling of shame and humiliation," he wrote to Olney.[521] In September of 1898, a few weeks after hostilities with Spain ended, Cleveland told a friend that American objectives could have been secured eventually without a shot fired.[522]

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false considerations of complaisance and party harmony." McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 274.

[518] Quoted in McElroy, 274

[519] "Never before in our history have we been beset with temptations so dangerous as those which now whisper in our ears alluring words of conquest and expansion, and point out to us fields bright with the glory of war." "Founder's Day Address at tike Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, N.J, June 21, 1898, in Grover Cleveland, *Letters and Addresses of Grover Cleveland* (Unit Book Publishing Company, 1909), 403.

[520] "Founder's Day Address at tike Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, N.J, June 21, 1898, in Cleveland, *Letters and Addresses of Grover Cleveland.*

[521] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 273.

[522] Gilder, *Grover Cleveland: A Record of Friendship*, 199–200.

Cleveland recognized that McKinley was under public pressure. However, as he reminded those who would listen, he was under tremendous pressure, as well.[523] "I was time and again threatened by frenzied men and women with dire calamities to be visited upon myself and children because of what they saw fit to assert as my enmity to the Cuban cause."[524] Early in the conflict, Cleveland had witnessed the nation's sentiments quickly shift in favor of the Cuban rebels, as Spain executed her notorious policy of extermination. He witnessed his diplomatic outreach fall to Spain's deaf ears as conditions on the island worsened. Meanwhile, Congress's early and repeated demand for a more active policy from the administration met Cleveland's unhesitant exercise of his constitutional powers and his public resistance.

As with his arguments relating to Hawaii and Venezuela, Cleveland had lived to witness his arguments about the Cuban crisis distorted. "My position was made known to Congress in the various messages in which the subject was discussed," the ex-president wrote to the Senate. He said that his views were "unmistakable," and none other than what "was perfectly well known" by those who paid attention to "the official documents of the time."[525] Cleveland did not see his stance as necessarily futile delay to—and certainly not preparation for—inevitable American intervention in Cuba. In his view, 1898 was not so different from

[523] Gilder, 220.
[524] Cleveland, "Message to the Senate, January 24, 1898," 35.
[525] Cleveland, 35.

1896; Spain, throughout, was addressing America's legal claims, and "there seemed to be really no justification for the attack upon Spain."[526]

[526] Gilder, *Grover Cleveland: A Record of Friendship*, 220.

Chapter 4: The Humanitarianism of William McKinley

McKinley's legacy in foreign policy is dominated by his decision, in late April of 1898, to go to war with Spain over Cuba. That decision was the first international war with a European power since 1812, setting the stage for Hawaiian annexation and American control of Puerto Rico, Wake Islands, and Guam. It also led to his other famous decision, the annexation of the Philippines and the subsequent brutal counterinsurgency.[527] For many scholars of the period, these decisions "established the United States as a dominant force for the twentieth century" and gave Americans a new "cosmic purpose."[528]

If McKinley was the father of America's birth as a global power, he was an unlikely one. There is no evidence that McKinley came into office intending to wage war against Spain.[529] McKinley was not particularly vocal about foreign policy during his campaigns and rarely made any mention of Cuba in his speeches leading up to his presidency. A pious and conservative Methodist, he had little in common with the colorful imperialists of the day, in-

[527] McKinley's other foreign policy decisions included sending American troops to join a European coalition to put down a rebellion in China without seeking congressional approval, intervention in Nicaragua, and an "Open Door" policy supporting Chinese independence. Also: taking control of eastern Samoa. It persuaded Britain to overturn the Clayton–Bulwer Treaty of 1850 that forbade the two nations from controlling a canal in Nicaragua.

[528] Robert A. Divine*, et al.*, *America Past and Present, Vol. 2* (New York: Longman, 1999), 653; F. Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Wiley, 2001), 40.

[529] Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*; H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse University Press, 1963).

cluding Roosevelt, whom he regarded as intemperate, and whose influence in the administration (as Assistant Secretary of the Navy) wielded much less clout than is typically assumed.[530] There is no indication that McKinley was seized, intellectually or politically, by Mahan or the other apostles of imperialism of the day. As he once told Carl Schurz, he would brook no "jingo nonsense" in his administration.[531] In his inaugural address, he mentioned foreign policy only briefly and mostly to make a point of which Cleveland must have approved: "We want no wars of conquest," he said, adding: "we must avoid the temptation of territorial aggression." McKinley, writes Walter A. McDougall, "hated war and cherished the modest republic bequeathed by the Founders."[532] As Robert W. Merry puts it in his recent, sympathetic biography: "[McKinley] never displayed the Roosevelt-Mahan-Lodge zeal in behalf of American sea power—and certainly never talked in their idiom of national grandeur. Nevertheless, when the war he sought to avoid became inevitable, he quickly employed that new navy to insert American power into faraway Asia and the nearby Caribbean in ways never before seen."[533]

This puzzle is all the more vexing given McKinley's early reputation as a politician devoted to a fairly narrow set of economic and trade issues.[534] As an Ohio congressman

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[530] Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*; Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*; Hamilton, President McKinley, War and Empire. This point is discussed in detail below.
[531] As Kagan explains, "He did not extol the idea of war as beneficial to the nation, the way Roosevelt and some others did. He did not feel the need to prove his mettle in combat…" Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 387.
[532] McDougall, *The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy: How America's Civil Religion Betrayed the National Interest*, 127.
[533] Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 307.
[534] Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 32.

(1877–1891) and then governor (1892–1896), he was his party's outspoken champion of protectionism. His eponymous 1890 tariff act radically raised tariffs to protect American manufacturing and helped propel him to national recognition. After the 1893 economic collapse turned much of the public against the Democratic Party, many looked to his promise to move trade and currency policy levers to stimulate industrial growth, drive down unemployment, and address a federal budget deficit of $70 million.[535] His successful 1896 presidential campaign, which focused mostly on trade and currency issues, forged a new coalition that included Northeast businessmen (newly abandoned by the Democrats) and factory workers from the Upper Midwest. He beat his populist challenger, William Jennings Bryan, so dramatically that it triggered a sweeping party realignment, leading to 16-year Republican control of the White House and a lasting revision of the Democratic Party's core domestic policy platform.

During the twentieth-century interregnum, the mismatch between the effects of McKinley's foreign policy and his reputation as a domestic policy president was reconciled by historians who adopted the argument of McKinley's contemporaneous critics. McKinley, they said, was a supple figurehead, or a vessel through which the designs of more determined souls implemented their agendas. He was a weak and indecisive leader, a pliable stooge of others, and a vulgar groveler of popularity—a depiction consistent with Roosevelt's famous derision of McKinley as having "no more backbone than a chocolate éclair."[536]

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[535] See Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 150.
[536] Quoted in James Ford Rhodes, *The McKinley and Roosevelt Administrations, 1897–1909* (1922), 57.

Recent scholarship has pulverized the depiction of McKinley as the clay of conniving souls or as a rapacious seeker of public acclaim.[537] The truth, according to these compelling revisionist works, is close to the opposite: McKinley was, in fact, a manipulator of manipulators. The historian Henry Adams described McKinley as "a marvellous manager of men," and, in handling matters of international relations, "adroit, courteous and far-sighted."[538] Perhaps lacking in charisma, McKinley was nevertheless exceptionally astute in politically maneuvering his party and in commanding his carefully-selected cabinet. His amiability and stoic nature concealed a kind of ruthlessness and resolve that dismantled obstacles incrementally, by exhausting friendly and unfriendly opposition.[539] In service of his agenda, he cannily exaggerated the power of those around him and sometimes pretended he was merely following rather than leading.[540] "I have talked with him again and again before a Cabinet meeting and found that his ideas were fixed and his mind firmly made up," reflected Elihu Root, who would serve as Secretary of War under McKinley and Roosevelt:

> He would then present the subject to the Cabinet in such a way as not to express his own decision, but yet bring about an agreement exactly along the lines of his own original ideas, while the members often thought the ideas were theirs. … He cared

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[537] David Healy, "McKinley as Commander-in-chief," Paolo E. Coletta (Jericho, New York: Exposition Press Inc., 1970); Hamilton, *America's New Empire*; Hamilton, *President McKinley, War and Empire*; Joseph A Fry, "William McKinley and the Coming of the Spanish-American War: A Study of the Besmirching and Redemption of an Historical Image," *Diplomatic History* 3, no. 1 (1979); Paolo Enrico Coletta, *Threshold to American Internationalism; Essays on the Foreign Policies of William McKinley.* (New York: Exposition Press, 1970).
[538] Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 374; T.B. Reed*, et al.*, *Modern Eloquence* (Literary Licensing, LLC, 1903), 1162.
[539] See Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*.
[540] As Herring explains: "Accessible, kindly, and a good listener, he was a master of the art of leading indirection, letting others seem to persuade him of positions he had already taken, appearing to follow while actually leading." Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, 311–312.

> nothing about the credit but McKinley always had his way. …He had vast influence with Congress. He led them by the power of affectionate esteem not by fear. He never bullied Congress.[541]

McKinley was also an uncommonly sophisticated political tactician, modernizing the executive by establishing direct channels to public opinion, often through the press or through an unprecedented enthusiasm for public speaking.[542] He was determined to combine his constitutional powers with new methods to break post-Civil-War inertia of congressional supremacy that hounded the presidency since Grant.[543]

It is a curious feature of even sympathetic scholarship that McKinley's foreign policy efforts are described in the passive voice—a hapless and somewhat pathetic act in a tragedy that played out independently of his will.[544] A well-meaning, affable, and peace-loving veteran from Ohio, McKinley is said to have been incapable of stopping an imperialist juggernaut driven by exogenous forces—cultural, political, economic, strategic—that, combined with proximate instigations to American sentiment, would have overwhelmed anyone else in his position. McKinley "led his country unwillingly toward a war that he did not want for a cause in which he did not believe," says Ernest May. Caught between the public and his party, May concludes that McKinley "capitulated to the jingoes," such as Roosevelt and Lodge.[545] McKinley "stood against the current," but was ultimately "swept forward with the

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[541] Quoted in Rhodes, *The McKinley and Roosevelt Administrations, 1897-1909*, 172.
[542] See Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 56, 127–128; Fry, "William McKinley and the Coming of the Spanish-American War: A Study of the Besmirching and Redemption of an Historical Image."
[543] See Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 163.
[544] Beisner, From the Old Diplomacy to the New: 1865-1900; May, Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power; LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*.
[545] May, Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power, 159.

tide" of public opinion, notes his biographer, H. Wayne Morgan.[546] Besides a war-hungry press, legislature, and public, McKinley is said to have faced great pressures to protect and expand the nation's commercial reach. According to Zakaria, once the business sector shifted its views in favor of war, McKinley acquiesced. "The experience of William McKinley and the Spanish-American War is an excellent example of how structural pressures can overwhelm an individual's personal preference."[547]

As in the case of Cleveland, the grand narrative about the strategic shift during the Gilded Age tempts us to the conclusion that McKinley's articulated justifications did not matter before taking them seriously, and before finding out whether they illuminate his intentions.[548]

Unlike Cleveland, McKinley left us no diary or autobiographical reflections of his presidency. However, in contrast to his reputation, he was deeply involved in diplomacy, war-preparation, and war conduct throughout his term.[549] Moreover, although the man was opaque in private relations, he ultimately conducted his foreign policy in a strikingly transparent way, directing his priorities through his ministers and periodically disclosing—through Congress, the press, and public messages—his evolving efforts. Guiding his decision

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[546] Morgan, *William McKinley and His America*, 375.
[547] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, 158.
[548] For a critique of this narrative, see Hamilton. Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, chapter 9.
[549] According to Offner, McKinley had no grand design for foreign policy except in subscribing to the Republican consensus that the United States ought to play a greater role in global affairs. Offner, *An Unwanted War*, 38. For a different perspective, see Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 33.

to intervene in Cuba and to annex the Philippines was a considered belief that the United States has a right and obligation to monitor and forcefully sanction conduct within sovereign territories.

THE CUBAN CRISIS (1897–1898)

According to the "tragic" narrative, the mounting pressures that charioted the United States toward global expansion arrived during McKinley's term due to its intersection with proximate catalysts over which McKinley had little control. In this account, McKinley entered office in March of 1897 determined to follow Cleveland's example in avoiding war while attempting to convince Madrid to appease the rebels insofar as was necessary to pacify the island. Although Spain's new government made conciliatory gestures and inched closer to relinquishing its hold on Cuba, relations broke down when cataclysmic incidents in early 1898 precipitated a new level of brinkmanship. That spring, as the pervasive public and political jingo spirit reached its peak, McKinley's squeamish indecision yielded to the clamor, and he finally, reluctantly, agreed to authorize military action.[550]

[550] For example: "In short, the Republican administration, despite McKinley's native caution, together with the majority in Congress and many powerful interests in the United States, were in the mood for expansion in 1898, if not to solve immediate economic problems then to claim a 'place in the sun' for the future and to address political problems at home." John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895–1898, (Envisioning Cuba)* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 248. See also Morgan, *William McKinley and His America*, 375; Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 190.; LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 403; Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, 158; H.G. Rickover, *How the Battleship Maine Was Destroyed* (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1976), 72–74.

The tragic, deterministic narrative is premised on the view that McKinley's stance on the situation did not fundamentally differ from his predecessor's. Indeed, McKinley himself sometimes portrayed his policy as essentially continuing Cleveland's diplomatic efforts to bring peace to the island without taking sides. In his pre-inauguration dinner with Cleveland, McKinley said: "My President, if I can only go out of office, at the end of my term, with the knowledge that I have done what lay in my power to avert this terrible calamity, with the success that has crowned your patience and persistence, I shall be the happiest man on earth."[551] McKinley's inaugural address (March 4, 1897), promised a continuation of George Washington's policy of non-interference, free of foreign entanglements. "It will be our aim to pursue a firm and dignified foreign policy, which shall be just, impartial, ever watchful of our national honor, and always insisting upon the enforcement of the lawful rights of American citizens everywhere."[552] There is little reason to doubt that McKinley was speaking forthrightly when he said, in June of 1897, that he anticipates "no departure from the policy of my predecessor" *vis-à-vis* Cuba.[553] Cleveland, as we've noted previously, seemed hopeful that McKinley would continue his policy of diplomatic patience. Given that McKinley's words and deeds pointed to a continuation of Cleveland's policy, is it not unreasonable

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[551] Quoted in George Frederick Parker, *Recollections of Grover Cleveland* (New York: Century Co., 1909), 249. See also Charles G. Dawes, *A Journal of the McKinley Years* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1950), 115.
[552] William McKinley, "Inaugural Address, March 4, 1897," in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897,*ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902).
[553] Quoted in Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires, 1878–1902*, 141.

to assume that, when he did decide to take military action in April 1898, he did so because exogenous circumstances compelled him?

There is a good reason why Cleveland soon lost his hope in his successor. Not long after his inauguration, McKinley indicated his rejection of his predecessor's insistence that American policy must abide by the sovereign rights of Spain. Whereas Cleveland believed that any consideration of intervention depended on Spain's abdication of her sovereignty (whether through proven disregard for the island or direct threat to American security), McKinley believed that Spain must demonstrate a commitment to humanitarian conduct and outcomes. On April 11, 1898, when McKinley asked for congressional approval to intervene in the conflict, his justifications were not a volte-face that represented his acquiescence to events beyond his control. If McKinley can be said to have acquiesced, it was an acquiescence to his own humanitarian policy that he had developed and articulated over the previous ten months.

The Context

Since McKinley said so little of the Cuban situation before his administration's diplomatic efforts with Spain, it is difficult to know the nature of his preconceived opinions.[554] But within a few weeks of his inauguration, American sympathizers of the Cuban cause had

[554] "I most politely decline to go on record. At this time I do not care to speak about it. In my position it were better that I say nothing now. Perhaps later I may have some things to say." "It Were Better That I Say Nothing." *The Norfolk Virginian*, October 15 1895.

reason to hope that McKinley would take more aggressive steps than had his predecessor. In May of 1897, he engaged a Senate debate by successfully attaining $50,000 for the relief of "American citizens in the island [who] are in a state of destitution, suffering for want of food and medicines."[555] Although the gesture invited little dispute, it struck observers as "an essentially new departure in international affairs," as one journal put it.[556] "It is certainly very unusual, if not unprecedented, for the government to make a relief appropriation for its own people in some foreign land." As the *New York Tribune* noted, "The policy of the Administration in reference to Cuba is not likely to be criticized, as was that of its predecessor, on the score of vacillation or indifference to the rights of American citizens."[557] Under Cleveland, Congress was acquainted with a president interposing his authority to counteract their anti-Spanish gestures. While McKinley would prove to be no less interested in defending the prerogatives of his office, by spring of 1897, he had at least signaled a willingness, if not an eagerness, to increase American engagement in Cuba.[558]

It was not until late June that McKinley's mostly symbolic gestures turned into policy, as his administration launched a shift in diplomacy that, over the course of the next eight months, culminated in a decision for military intervention. The course-change commenced

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555 William McKinley, "Message to Congress on the Condition of American Citizens in Cuba, May 17, 1897," in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897,*ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902).
556 Quoted in White Trumbull, *Our War With Spain for Cuba's Freedom: A Thrilling Account of the Land and Naval Operations of American Soldiers and Sailors in Our War With Spain, and the Heroic Struggles of Cuban Patriots Against Spanish Tyranny* (Classic Reprint) (Forgotten Books, 2016).
557 Quoted in Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 66.
558 It also seems that McKinley was more personally perturbed by reports of inhumanity in Cuba. See Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 38.

shortly after McKinley dispatched William J. Calhoun to Cuba to provide an objective, first-hand report. On June 22, McKinley's longtime friend reported back his unsurprisingly bleak conclusions: The conflict was at a stalemate; the rebels would not accept any proposal that granted them autonomy short of complete independence; and yet, it was far from clear that the rebels were ready for self-rule. In other words, conditions were more-or-less as Cleveland had found them. The only difference was the passage of time and the unceasing deterioration of conditions.[559]

McKinley's Case for Intervention

In June and July of 1897, McKinley's first formal diplomatic statements notified Madrid that the United States has abandoned a "policy of mere inaction" and will now hold Spain responsible for her "manner of conducting operations" within her territorial domain.[560] Spain must now pursue her interests in conformity with "every paramount sentiment of humanity"—that is, "in a manner responsive to the precepts of ordinary humanity and calculated to invite as well the expectant forbearance of this Government as the confidence of the Cuban people in the beneficence of Spanish control."[561] Writing on behalf of the President, Secretary of State John Sherman announced a new policy based on the right

[559] Tone, War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895–1898, (Envisioning Cuba), 210; Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 47.
[560] Mr. Sherman to Mr. Dupuy de Lôme, June 26, 1897. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 507.
[561] Mr. Sherman to Mr. Dupuy de Lôme, June 26, 1897. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 508.

to monitor and sanction a conflict that affects both "sentimental" and "direct" interests, including domestic tranquility, commercial prosperity, and national safety:

> He [McKinley] is bound by the higher obligations of his representative office to protest against the uncivilized and inhumane conduct of the campaign in the Island of Cuba. He conceives that he has a right to demand that a war, conducted almost within sight of our shores and grievously affecting American citizens and their interests throughout the length and breadth of the land, shall at least be conducted according to the military codes of civilization.[562]

In contrast to Cleveland's policy of friendly, conscience-appealing mediation, McKinley's directives deny Spain's right to reestablish control over her colony by continuing her ongoing strategy of exhausting her enemy militarily.[563] As long as Spain continued its "policy of devastation and interference with the most elementary rights of human existence," the United States had a right to interfere in Spain's civil conflict by monitoring and sanctioning her behavior.[564] Speaking "in the name of the American people and in the name of common humanity," the McKinley administration now promised it would hold Spain responsible for *how* it waged war.[565]

The directives also unambiguously demoted the legal concerns so prominent in Cleveland's policy. The summer memos are nearly silent about America's legal obligations;

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[562] Mr. Sherman to Mr. Dupuy de Lôme, June 26, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 508.
[563] "Day by day the conviction gathers strength that it is visionary for Spain to hope that Cuba, even if eventually subjugated by sheer exhaustion, can ever bear to her anything like the relation of dependence and profit she once bore. The policy which obviously attempts to make Cuba worthless to the Cubans, should they prevail, must inevitably make the island equally worthless to Spain in the event of reconquest, whether it be regained as a subject possession or endowed with a reasonable measure of self-administration." Mr. Woodford to Mr. Sherman, September 23, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 570.
[564] Mr. Sherman to Mr. Dupuy de Lôme, June 26, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 508.
[565] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 508.

they speak of the laws of neutrality less as obligations than burdens that only serve an additional motivation for American engagement in the conflict.[566] Spain, for its part, could no longer count on good relations with the United States so long as it fulfills its legal duties. Her legal territorial authority grants her only "reasonable time" to restore internal peace. Referring to Spain as a "titular authority," the July memo avers that "reasonable time" has passed, and that the rules of "international comity" do not infinitely constrain the United States to "remain a passive spectator."[567] Insofar as the United States maintains a posture of neutral noninterference, it is now doing so out of discretion rather than any moral obligation.

If John L. Offner is correct that McKinley had now placed an "impossible" burden on Spain and put the two powers on an inevitable "collision course," then it was a course paved by McKinley's newly assembled moral strictures.[568] Within six months of his inauguration, McKinley had signaled to Madrid a departure from his predecessor's policy, even while refraining from throwing his lot with the Cuban rebels.[569] McKinley had told Spain that the United States no longer views itself as self-constrained by the principles of presumed

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[566] "This Government has labored and is still laboring under signal difficulties in its administration of its neutrality laws. It is ceaselessly confronted with questions affecting the inherent and treaty rights of its citizens in Cuba." (Mr. Sherman to Mr. Woodford, July 16, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 561.) As Offner points out, McKinley's instructions do not even mention America's transgressions or American filibustering, reflecting that the new administration did not see America's legal obligations to Spain as a paramount issue in diplomatic relations with Spain. (Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898*, 57.

[567] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 560.

[568] Offner, 57–58. Similarly, Merry says that McKinley "commanded little or no control over events in Cuba, and hence the path upon which he had set his country may have been beyond his control as well." Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 226.

[569] McKinley indicated a genuine belief (hardly unique to him) that Spain was allowing her pride step on her long-term interest, as well as the island's inhabitants. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 69.

sovereignty. Not only did McKinley forbid Spain from ratcheting up its military conduct, but he had declared Spain's ongoing efforts as beyond what is acceptable to the United States, and his right to intervene on behalf of "the inherent rights of civilized man."[570] The United States has the right and duty to evaluate (and sanction, if it determines it necessary) Spain's conduct in war. In principle, at least, Spain remained free, in her difficult position, to discover a peaceful settlement, whether by concessions or abdication. Alternatively, McKinley was free to retreat from his policy, attenuate his demands to match his predecessor's, and limit the nation to its offer of voluntary mediation consistent with Spanish sovereignty. As it turns out, neither side was willing to retreat.

Still, for a while, McKinley's new demands seemed to come at an auspicious moment. Weeks after Madrid responded to McKinley by declaring the new policy a violation of Spain's sovereign rights, Madrid's Conservative party was supplanted by the Liberal party, which sought Cuban autonomy as part of a political settlement. A critic of General Weyler's "excessive severity and repression" in a program that had done little toward pacification, Spain's new prime minister, Práxedes Mateo Sagasta, ordered the general to return home and

570 "As to the manner in which the assistance of the United States can be effectively rendered in the Cuban situation, the President has no desire to embarrass the Government of Spain by formulating precise proposals. All that is asked or expected is that some safe way may be provided for action which the United States may undertake with justice and self-respect, and that the settlement shall be a lasting one, honorable and advantageous to Spain and a Cuba and equitable to the United States." Mr. Sherman to Mr. Woodford, July 16, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 561.

promised amnesty and release of Americans in Cuban jails. Most importantly, the new cabinet promised a negotiated autonomy program, consistent with Cuban interests and Spanish honor, that would go into effect at the beginning of 1898.[571]

Madrid's promising gestures toward reform were coupled with a reaffirmation that the Cuban matter is fundamentally an internal affair and that no other power has any just claim to forcibly interfere, even through forcible mediation.[572] Madrid agreed to oversee an autonomy plan while insisting that the Spanish flag would always fly over their island, and that "the authority of the central power is in nowise diminished or abated."[573] It was made clear that any change in Spanish behavior would come from the mother country's internal deliberation about the best means to secure her interests—not the asserted demands of any foreign government. In the meantime, Madrid was also facing a complicated reality in Cuba. As was apparent from the rebels' loud demands and the abject failure of Spain's significant military exertion in weakening a force a fifth of its size, Madrid's promised autonomy plans fell short of rebels' demand of complete independence.[574]

Madrid's ambiguous motions seemed to reflect a genuine effort by some of Spain's ruling elite to reach a peaceful settlement while appeasing the strong nationalistic sentiments of the Spanish public. Since his arrival in Spain, U.S. minister in Madrid, General Stewart L.

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[571] Quoted in Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895–1902*, vol. I, 126.
[572] See Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 68.
[573] Attached in Mr. Woodford to Mr. Sherman, November 27, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 632.
[574] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 251.

Woodford, was told by the queen regent that she wants to avoid offense to popular feelings in her country, but that she shared McKinley's urgency to see reforms.[575] "I believe that she is sensible and is honestly trying to do the best she can under most difficult circumstances," wrote Woodford.[576] Meanwhile, Spanish conservatives were criticizing the governing liberals for going soft on Spanish interests, at one point even demanding Weyler's reinstatement.[577]

The McKinley administration held no illusion about these difficulties, reacting to Madrid's efforts with cautious optimism. A persistent insurgency was successfully stalling a trained army five-times its size; clearly, the rebels would not voluntarily abandon their demands for independence. However, precisely because there was little reason to hope that Cuban insurgents would quiet their cries, there was a good reason to believe that Spain would soon discover her interests in hastening more generous concessions. McKinley hoped that Madrid's political reforms would eventually pave the way toward a more realistic resolution in which Spain relinquished control of the island.[578]

The Republican Party, officially more enthusiastic of the Cuban cause than McKinley, remained patient with the President's diplomacy. While House Democrats were playing the role of House Republicans during the Cleveland administration, assailing the President

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[575] See Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, chapters 13–14.
[576] Quoted in Merry, 226.
[577] To this Woodford would reply: "General Weyler will never be allowed to land in Cuba again," and that the Liberal government should consider its present course locked in. Merry, 226.
[578] "Even more favorable than could be expected," reported the *Chicago Tribune*, on the administration's reactions (November 20, 1897). See Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 69.

of being overly deferential to Madrid, Republicans were now vigorously defending the President and urging members to give his outreach some time.[579] By the end of the year, even Lodge sought to persuade his Senate colleagues to provide the President with more time.[580]

In his first annual message to Congress (on December 6, 1897), McKinley publicly elucidated the new basis for his foreign policy even while denying it is anything but a logical continuation of his predecessor's diplomacy that sought peace and order without taking sides or recognizing the insurgents. Forcible annexation is "by our code of morality…criminal aggression." Referring to American obligations in Cuba, McKinley said:

> Throughout all these horrors and dangers to our own peace this Government has never in any way abrogated its sovereign prerogative of reserving to itself the determination of its policy and course according to its own high sense of right and in consonance with the dearest interests and convictions of our own people should the prolongation of the strife so demand.[581]

Despite McKinley's highly politic assertion that he was a faithful steward of his predecessor's policy, his own "high sense of right"—his priorities, emphases, and moral justifications—were fundamentally different from Cleveland's. The most striking difference is McKinley's unwillingness to countenance a peace based on Spain's military victory and, relatedly, the introduction of a humanitarian code (however ill-defined) that would be enforced by the

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[579] Peifer, *Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents*, 39.
[580] A majority of Democrats and some bellicose members of his own party, however, sought stronger action. See Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 251–252.
[581] William McKinley, "First Annual Message, December 6, 1897," in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897,*ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 131.

United States. While McKinley acknowledged that "the civilized code of war has been disregarded" by both sides of the conflict, he departs from his predecessor by saying that Spain's "abuse of the rights of war" deserves America's urgent protests. Accordingly, he reserved the harshest condemnation to Spain's "cruel policy of concentration" that, he reminds his audience, began over a year before he took office. "It was not civilized warfare. It was extermination."[582] Moving forward, the United States would maintain a policy that takes an interest in the welfare of Cubans. "We have only the desire to see the Cubans prosperous and contented, enjoying that measure of self control which is the inalienable right of man, protected in their right to reap the benefit of the exhaustless treasures of their country."[583]

McKinley also reveals he is much less inclined to forgive Spain for its abuses against American citizens. Cleveland had sought the release of American prisoners, but he went out of his way to justify Spanish indignation because naturalized Americans were undermining Spain's sovereign authority, behaving as "Cubans at heart in all their feelings and interests."[584] McKinley, by contrast, did not equivocate, presenting these arrests as an example of Spanish abuse of war, and says it is his "first duty" to demand the instant release or speedy trial of all American citizens.[585]

On the question of recognizing the belligerents, McKinley's argument is superficially similar to his predecessor's. Like Cleveland, and much to the disappointment of strident

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[582] McKinley, 129.
[583] McKinley, 128.
[584] Cleveland, "Fourth Annual Message (Second Term), December 7, 1896."
[585] McKinley, 129.

champions of Cuban independence, McKinley privately and publicly regarded widespread sentiments in favor of official recognition of the Cuban rebels as an obstacle to diplomacy. Also like his predecessor, McKinley understood that recognition of Cuban belligerency was a scheme to force the executive to renounce Spanish sovereign supremacy in Cuba, halt ongoing bilateral negotiations with Madrid, and elevate Cuban claim for independence before it demonstrates a capability for self-government.[586]

Although both presidents agreed on the inexpediency and imprudence of a recognition policy, the two presidents articulated strikingly different moral justifications for how they arrived at their positions and how they understood America's obligations. We recall that Cleveland's opposition to recognition was based on a conviction that international law demanded a neutral presumption of Spain's sovereign legitimacy in conducting her internal affairs. In contrast, McKinley's opposition to recognition followed his conviction that the United States has a right and duty to monitor, judge, and sanction any contestant departing from standards of right conduct. Thus, McKinley agreed with Cleveland that the Cuban insurrection was a *legal* non-entity. But he did not share Cleveland's view that what follows from that fact is an abdication of America's role as judge in the dispute.

Instead, McKinley argued that recognizing the Cubans was misguided precisely *because* it would amount to a promise of American neutrality. Classifying the situation as an

[586] Some pro-intervention lawmakers did not conceal their intentions to force a *casus belli* which would bring American forces into alliance with the Cuban insurgents. See Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century,* chapter 14.

interstate conflict would equalize the legal standing of the Cubans and the Spanish, give a practical advantage to the more powerful party, and hamper America's role in the dispute.[587] As he put it, "In the code of nations there is no such thing as a naked recognition of belligerency, unaccompanied by the assumption of international neutrality." This "onerous code of neutrality," he said, "could impart to the United States no jurisdiction between Spain and the insurgents. It would give the United States no right of intervention to enforce the conduct of the strife within the paramount authority of Spain according to the international code of war."[588] Unlike Cleveland, McKinley did not rule out recognizing the Cubans before the demonstrated evisceration of Spain's rightful rule on the island, saying there could come a moment when recognizing Cubans would become a matter of America's "right and duty."[589]

For McKinley, Spain's official territorial and legal dominion could not purchase a guarantee of noninterference because such legal considerations were conditioned on the sov-

[587] McKinley points out that Spain could, for example, use its navy to invoke maritime rights that would give it *de facto* control over Cuban ports and hamper aid to Cubans "Possessing a navy and controlling the ports of Cuba, her maritime rights could be asserted not only for the military investment of the island, but up to the margin of our own territorial waters, and a condition of things would exist for which the Cubans within their own domain could not hope to create a parallel, while its creation through aid or sympathy from within our domain would be even more impossible than now, with the additional obligations of international neutrality we would perforce assume."
[588] McKinley, 133–4.
[589] McKinley, 134.

ereign's humanitarian conduct. The United States had the right to demand of Spain humanitarian treatment toward its own citizens, and to enforce "the international code of war" when Spain miscarries humanitarian justice.[590]

In December of 1896, McKinley believed that his country's involvement in Spain was justified on humanitarian grounds. He nevertheless opposed military confrontation because he regarded it as a last resort, believing that a more patient method that exerted pressure on Spain could achieve the same ends with less risk.[591] Spain's new government had pledged promising humanitarian reforms, including a reversal of "the policy of cruel rapine and extermination that so long shocked the universal sentiment of humanity."[592] However, McKinley regarded American patience to be a matter purely of national discretion rather than any obligation to international law or to Spanish sovereignty, acknowledging that "intervention upon humanitarian grounds…has not failed to receive my most anxious and earnest consideration":

> Sure of the right, keeping free from all offense ourselves, actuated only by upright and patriotic considerations, moved neither by passion nor selfishness, the Government will continue its watchful care over the rights and property of American citizens and will abate none of its efforts to bring about by peaceful agencies a peace which shall be honorable and enduring. If it shall hereafter appear to be a duty imposed by

590 McKinley, 134.

591 Merry, chapter 14.

592 These humanitarian standards should not be confused with any insistence on Cuban independence. Not only does McKinley not suggest any insistence on reforms that would grant Cubans independence, he seems to take for granted that any reforms would conserve Spanish sovereignty. "…that reforms must be instituted in accordance with the needs and circumstances of the time, and that these reforms, while designed to give full autonomy to the colony and to create a virtual entity and self-controlled administration, shall yet conserve and affirm the sovereignty of Spain by a just distribution of powers and burdens upon a basis of mutual interest untainted by methods of selfish expediency."

> our obligations to ourselves, to civilization and humanity to intervene with force, it shall be without fault on our part and only because the necessity for such action will be so clear as to command the support and approval of the civilized world.[593]

McKinley never wavered from his view that the United States maintains a right to take action once it determines it must do to secure an "honorable and enduring" peace, defined according to the (ill-defined) humanitarian standards of his administration.

Corresponding to McKinley's emphasis on America's humanitarian duties is his concerted effort to play down what his predecessor had regarded as America's inescapable legal duties. McKinley acknowledged his continuation of Cleveland's anti-filibustering policy and justified it as necessary to maintain a unified national policy, and one in "full duty according to the law of nations." However, whereas Cleveland had saved the most loaded words to berate American filibusterers, McKinley trains his fire at Spanish claims that his administration is failing to stymie the transnational offenses.[594] McKinley, as he had in his private diplomatic directives, spoke of the anti-filibustering policy as an unfortunate one not because its need reflects poorly on Americans, but because it is a necessity that is subjecting the country to costly burdens.[595]

Since McKinley came to office on a Republican platform that promised Cuban liberation, his first annual statement to Congress can be viewed as the noble effort of an anti-war

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[593] McKinley, 136.

[594] "Discussion of the question of the international duties and responsibilities of the United States as Spain understands them is presented, with an apparent disposition to charge us with failure in this regard. This charge is without any basis in fact."

[595] McKinley said that the policy comes "at the cost of millions and by the employment of the administrative machinery of the nation at command." McKinley, "First Annual Message, December 6, 1897."

president attempting to satiate domestic pressure for more aggressive action against Spain—a signal that his attempts to settle the conflict diplomatically does not detract from his hawkishness.[596] However much McKinley sought to "sell" his policy, he did so in a way entirely consistent with his private diplomatic efforts. In these efforts, the President said that he (like Cleveland) preferred a diplomatic peace consistent with Spain's honor and interests, but (unlike Cleveland) would not accept such a peace if sought by inhumane means.[597] McKinley, unlike Cleveland, never circumscribed America's right to interfere by the entitlements of Spain's sovereign rights over its territory. Both privately and publicly, he had said he was unwilling to accept a peace created by the Spanish Mauser. Instead, he articulated a duty to individual welfare that superseded concern for sovereignty. Insofar as McKinley was concerned with international law, he invoked its protection of individuals, not states.[598] Cleveland viewed the conflict as Spain's civil war (albeit one touching on American interests), and suggested Spanish sovereignty, together with America's position as a dutiful member of a family of nations, prohibits American intervention. McKinley, by contrast, viewed Cuba as a contest of political causes that the United States has every right to judge and sanction according to its estimation of proper codes of war.

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[596] His words did little to satisfy champions of Cuban recognition and independence. On the other hand, Gould says that "public opinion in the United States seemed to be inclined to support McKinley" at this point, though Gould does not explain how he draws that conclusion. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 70.
[597] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 252.
[598] See, for example, Mr. Woodford to Señor Gullon, December 20, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 647.

McKinley's elevation of humanitarian interests and demotion of concern for presumed Spanish sovereignty would prove to have a tangible effect on the conflict. It signaled a policy change to Madrid, which read McKinley's congressional message "in a spirit of intense hostility by everyone except the Cabinet of Sagasta," according to an army officer based in Madrid. "The unofficial expressions of some of its members are by no means friendly. They see it as a veiled threat of intervention unless war in Cuba stops."[599] Within days of McKinley's address, his administration directed a public campaign for charitable assistance to Cuba through the Red Cross and with coordination of American officials in Havana. (McKinley himself, historians later learned, contributed $5,000 to the national fund anonymously.)[600] For the first time, the United States would have an official hand in directing a national policy within Spanish territory, independent of Spanish oversight.

McKinley's concurrent secretive diplomacy suggests his policy shift was genuine and not merely a way to posture in front of a war-hungry domestic audience. Two weeks following his message to Congress, Woodford confirmed to Madrid that the President believes he has the right and duty to monitor Spain's promised political program, as well as its military conduct, within Spain's own territorial domain.[601] The American government would maintain an "attitude of benevolent expectancy" toward Madrid's promised reforms, buoyed by encouraging signs that Spain's "policy of devastation and extermination that so long shocked

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[599] Quoted in Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 70.
[600] Morgan, *William McKinley and His America*, 349.
[601] Mr. Woodford to Señor Gullon, December 20, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 647–654.

the universal sentiment of humanity has already been signally reversed."[602] But Spain's future actions will "be judged by their realization" of regenerating Cuba "upon the rock of equity and not upon the shifting sands of selfish interests."[603] Noting America's security and commercial interests in peace, the letter nevertheless emphasizes the "all-controlling sentiment of humanity" that guides American policy. Woodford warns that the "the history of civilized nations shows that such sentiments and such considerations have constrained the suffering on-lookers to mediation, and even intervention, when longer forbearance has ceased to be a virtue." Woodford's letter rebukes Spain's demand for more diligent enforcement of neutrality laws, arguing that the United States has gone above and beyond its duties. Whereas Cleveland had invoked Spain's sovereignty and its legal protections as a constraint on American action, the McKinley administration had now flipped the logic on its head: Woodford said that Spain's insistence that no state of war exists and that it is merely suppressing a domestic insurrection means that the United States is not bound by some neutrality laws that only apply to interstate wars.[604]

To review: Between June and December of 1897—before any of the cascading incidents of early 1898 that are commonly portrayed as decisive catalysts in American entry into

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[602] Mr. Sherman to Mr. Woodford, November 20, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 603.
[603] Mr. Woodford to Señor Gullon, December 20, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 647–654.
[604] Invoking the neutrality law of 1818 and the subsequent Supreme Court rulings on it, Woodford's letter explains that America's obligations are quite limited. That law states that the United States may not enlist military forces, undertake military operations, or dispatch armed ships directly to insurgents. But as long as Spain and the United States agree that it is a domestic quarrel, the law permits the United States to sell and transport arms and munitions of wars, as well as carry unarmed insurgents, as long as those passengers are not an organized militia.

war—McKinley had demonstrated, in both his diplomatic overtures and public announcements, a departure from Cleveland's overriding commitment to a policy consistent with due regard for Spanish sovereignty. McKinley and his ministers had not put down any specific terms for an eventual peace settlement. They also refrained from expressing any support for the moral cause of Cuban independence (in fact, they pointed out the practical problems of doing so). Nevertheless, departing from his predecessor, McKinley's private and public messages had effectively ruled out a Spanish military victory; he conveyed to both Spain and the American public that any path to peace could not be implemented by Spain's "sheer force of arms."[605] While abandoning his predecessor's view that American policy was constrained by the fact that this was Spain's domestic quarrel, McKinley announced a new "righteous peace" involving America's monitoring and sanctioning of Spanish military conduct and (no less vaguely) whether the outcomes of Madrid's reform plan prove equitable.

If Spain had hoped its autonomy plan would quell American demands and buy more time to exhaust its insubordinate colonial children, it took only days into the new year to receive its rude awakening. In January, pro-Spanish riots broke out in Havana protesting the autonomy program. The outbreaks were dispiriting to McKinley and his assistant secretary of state, William R. Day, who was in charge of the administration's Cuban policy. If Spanish officers could not accept menial steps toward autonomy, how could they accept their ultimate fate of

[605] Mr. Woodford to Señor Gullon, December 20, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 647.

appeasing an irrepressible insurgency?[606] Spain's ambassador in Washington reported to his colleagues that war was now a real possibility since the American government "have lost all faith in Spain's success."[607]

The January riots not only demonstrated that Spanish intransigence on Cuba was categorically toxic, but that it endangered Americans who were within the blast radius of the strife. The riots expedited McKinley's budding efforts to prepare for the possibility of war with Spain. McKinley had already instructed the Navy to plan for contingencies around the island and to strategize reconnaissance missions in Cuban harbors. Commodore George Dewey, the commander of the Navy's Asiatic fleet, was stationed in Hong Kong, awaiting further orders. McKinley had also instructed the military to refuse enlistment termination.[608] On January 25, adding to these efforts, McKinley decided to send a second-class battleship, the USS *Maine,* to Havana to prevent future disorders and protect American interests on the islands.[609] McKinley understood, and previously vocalized, the risks of moving American assets into a hot zone. Still, he believed that it was important for the United States to demonstrate its commitment to peace missions to keep pressure on Spain's Liberal government and its promised reforms.[610]

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[606] Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 71.
[607] Quoted in French Ensor Chadwick, *The Relations of the United States and Spain: Diplomacy* (C. Scribner's Sons, 1909), 533.
[608] Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 71.
[609] Presciently, McKinley worried that Maine's presence might provoke a crisis. See Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 256.
[610] Peifer, *Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents*, 37. McKinley disagreed with Cleveland's decision to discontinue naval visits to Havana. See Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, chapter 16.

Madrid reacted to Washington's ominous military maneuvering and diplomatic directives with stiff defiance. On January 20, Spain's minister to Washington, Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, told Day that the United States is indirectly responsible for the conflict since the insurrection was kept alive by America's tacit moral support for the rebels and the government's tepid response to Cuban advocacy within its borders. Then, on February 8, replying to Woodford's letter of December 20 and the subsequent navy maneuvers, the Spanish government berated Washington for departing from its high tradition of neutrality and interfering with Spain's internal problems.[611] The letter said that the United States was assuming the role of judge and attempting to determine, without authority, "whether indispensable conditions of peace have been realized" by Spain.[612] Madrid acknowledged that the new administration has continued with its anti-filibustering duties but (somewhat ironically) demanded that Washington take more aggressive steps to shut down pro-Cuban propaganda within America's sovereign borders.[613] Madrid, meanwhile, owes the United States nothing regard-

[611] Apparently written February 1 but received by the American mission only on February 8. Señor Gullon to Mr. Woodford, February 1, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 658–664.

[612] As the sovereign in the conflict, the "Spanish Government does not admit the right of neighboring country to limit duration of struggle." The United States is limited to friendly observation and aspiration; but "foreign intrusions and interferences are never and in no way justified." The letter states that the Spanish cabinet finds it inexplicable that the United States would depart from its long-standing policy, dating back decades, of avoiding any fixed timetable for termination of Cuban insurrections. Attached in Mr. Woodford to Mr. Sherman, February 9, 1897, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 657.

[613] Spain's position long-held position was that the United States ought to actively break up the Manhattan-based junta on the grounds that it is interfering with both Spanish sovereignty and Spanish reforms. See Merry; Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898*, 117–118, 194–195.

ing Cuba: The "Spanish people and Spanish Government will resolutely maintain their legitimate and traditional sovereignty in Cuba." The letter then promises that Spain would do whatever is necessary to maintain its rule of Cuba:

> Cuba has its life and future united to Spain, and to conspire against their perpetual union reveals designs of destruction and involves inadmissible pretension. Peace necessary for Cuba and advantageous the United States can be found only in the formula of colonial self-government and Spanish sovereignty.[614]

Following Madrid's truculent reply to Washington, two events within a week of each other quickly escalated the situation. On February 9, a private letter by Dupuy de Lôme to a friend was leaked and published in the *New York Journal*. It described McKinley as a "weak and a bidder for the admiration of the crowd besides being a would-be politician (*politicastro*) who tries to leave a door open behind himself while keeping on good terms with the jingoes of his party."[615] Despite a prompt apology from Madrid, the letter was sensationalized by the yellow press as an audacious taunt of American mettle. The controversy led Congress to ask McKinley to release to it the diplomatic correspondence to Madrid. One week later (February 16), the *Maine* exploded near the Havana harbor, killing 266 marines. The reaction by both the press and Congress was now predictably (and perhaps understandably) frenzied.[616]

The Dupuy de Lôme letter and *Maine* incidents meant that McKinley had to proceed diplomatic engagement with greater public scrutiny and pressure. Even as he sought to

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[614] Señor Gullon to Mr. Woodford, February 1, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 658–664.
[615] Retirement of Señor Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, Spanish Minister at Washington, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1007–1008.
[616] Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 75. Many newspapers that had previously argued against intervention now softened or reversed their stance. Peifer, *Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents*, 46.

tame congressional anxiety and anger, some politicians came to believe that continued diplomacy in the face of Spanish crimes was deeply shameful. The uproar would peak around mid-March, when, upon a return from a self-funded visit to Cuba, Republican Senator Redfield Proctor, a Vermont conservative with a reputation for sobriety and isolationism, converted into an interventionist. The Senator held no illusions about the dangers of Cuban independence but nevertheless said American inaction in the face of the horrors he had witnessed was no longer justifiable. The Senator said the strongest argument for American intervention was not the barbarity of Weyler or the loss of *Maine* but the plain fact that no reasonable person could expect a Cuban majority to cease "struggling for freedom and deliverance from the worst misgovernment of which I ever had knowledge."[617] Proctor's Wyoming colleague observed that the speech produced "a raising of the blood and temper as well as of shame that we, a civilized people, an enlightened nation, a great republic, born in a revolt against tyranny, should permit such a state of things within less than a hundred miles of our shore as that which exists in Cuba."[618]

Proctor's speech dovetailed with, and perhaps encouraged, a shift in business attitudes. For years, while the public became increasingly hostile to Spanish conduct in Cuba, those with fears of domestic economic disruptions opposed American intervention, while prominent business leaders—including John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan—expressed

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[617] Quoted in Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 134.
[618] Quoted in Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 77.

deep skepticism over potential American intervention.[619] Following the events of early 1898, some prominent business leaders were now following the mood of the moment, joining other erstwhile reluctant souls like Elihu Root, and vocally supporting Cuban liberation.[620] According to the tragic narrative of the war, the public pressure created by these incidents meant that averting war was now inconceivable.[621]

However, McKinley's words and actions during the spring of 1898 suggest a continuity in his objectives and his declining optimism in achieving them—less because of "pressures" than because of Spanish intransigence amid continually deteriorating conditions in Cuba.

Throughout February and March, McKinley continued to pursue two tracks—preparing for the contingency of war while attempting to persuade Madrid to renounce its claims to the island. Early in March, he successfully sought $50 million from Congress for national defense spending, including a preemptive purchase of Brazilian ships that the Spanish were about to purchase.[622] The moves stunned Spain for its brazenness while reassuring

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[619] Hamilton, *President McKinley, War and Empire*, volume I, 195–199; Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 90–94.

[620] Highly sensitive to the influence of Wall Street, LaFeber nevertheless concedes that American industrialists and bankers did not begin to favor intervention until March of 1898. (LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, chapter 8.) According to Pratt, business interests were "generally opposed to expansion, or indifferent to it, until after May 1, 1898." The need for new markets was a need "discovered not by businessmen but by historians and other intellectuals, by journalists and politicians." Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands*, 22. On the shift in business attitudes, see also Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Cornell University Press, 2007), 94–95.

[621] Louis A. Pérez, *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 76.

[622] On May 6, he told the chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations: "I must have the money to get ready for war. I am doing everything possible to prevent war but it must come, and we are not prepared for

Congress that the President was not limiting his efforts to interminable diplomacy.[623] Meanwhile, McKinley sought to use the domestic clamor in service of his diplomacy, that is, to move Spain toward proposals that would pave toward a dignified withdrawal from Cuba.[624]

McKinley was able to pursue these tracks only by resisting, for weeks, the supposedly overwhelming frenzy for war. For all of the uproar created by the press (and underscored by scholars), there is no indication that McKinley took personally any of Dupuy de Lôme's errant insults.[625] More important to him was what the letter conveyed about Spain's goodwill, or lack thereof. Besides insulting the President, the letter revealed that Spain's autonomy program in Cuba is "a waste of time and progress," and that Madrid believes that the Cuba situation will ultimately resolve militarily. Madrid was using negotiations with Washington as a stalling mechanism while it waged a counter-propaganda campaign to influence American opinion in its favor. In other words, the letter was unwelcome news for those, like McKinley, who had hoped Spain could be persuaded to restore peace in Cuba through gradual political reforms. Dupuy de Lôme was saying that his government was playing along, but only as far as was necessary to buy time to exhaust the insurgency by military means.[626]

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war. Who knows where this war will lead us; it may be more than war with Spain." Quoted in LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 349.

[623] Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 76.

[624] Gould, 77.

[625] His administration seemed to find it significant largely because it could be exploited it as leverage against Spain and because it shed light on Spain's duplicity. See Mr. Day to Mr. Woodford, February 23, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*; Mr. Day to Mr. Woodford, March 31, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

[626] LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion*, *1860–1898*, 348.

McKinley's reactions to the *Maine* incident was similarly sober and thoughtful, despite the worsening state of relations with Madrid and the vituperative, anti-Spanish assessments in the press.[627] The *Maine* incident may have confirmed McKinley's long-standing worry that the very existence of a nearby conflict exposed the United States to collateral dangers. Still, the official announcement was that the administration is withholding judgment until a complete expert investigation concluded. Diplomacy with Madrid continued; in correspondence and meetings, the incident was often unmentioned.[628] In a speech to the University of Pennsylvania on the occasion of George Washington's birthday, McKinley alluded to the *Maine* incident only by way exhorting his audience to emulate the first president's example in demonstrating equipoise amid tumult: "He has emphasized the necessity at all times for the exercise of a sober and dispassionate public judgment. Such judgment, my fellow-citizens, is the best safeguard in the calm of tranquil events, and rises superior and triumphant above the storms of woe and peril."[629] In his December 1898 annual address, following the conclusion of hostilities with Spain, McKinley would reflect on the *Maine* reaction as a moment when the United States had every reason to move instantly but chose to wait and

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[627] As Offner explains: "Had there been no emotionalism over the Maine, would McKinley's diplomacy have fared any better? Probably not. The differences over Cuba were as large as ever. Time had run out, and neither Washington nor Madrid had any new proposals to offer." Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 158.

[628] After meeting with his Spanish counterparts on February 25, Woodford wrote to McKinley and made no mention of the incident. Mr. Woodford to the President, February 26, 1898.

[629] William McKinley, "Address to the Officers and Students of the University of Pennsylvania, Academy of Music, Philadelphia, February 22nd, 1898"," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1893), 77.

take action only on its own terms—"striking evidence of the poise and sturdy good sense distinguishing our national character."[630]

At the time, however, it was not the nation that insisted on poise and patience; it was McKinley. The President continued to press for calm even after six weeks after the explosion when the investigatory committee would publish a verdict that would blame the Maine explosion on foul-play (effectively pointing to Spain).[631] Senators in the Foreign Relations Committee were nearly unanimous in favoring Cuban independence, and dozens of House Republicans threatened to join the Democrats in forcing a vote on the matter. McKinley convinced Congress to delay further action that might hurt the outstanding proposals to the Sagasta government, agreeing to release the diplomatic correspondence of his administration, and assuring that he would compel Spain to pay reparations.[632] McKinley's commitment to exhausting the path of peaceful diplomacy did not waiver, even as his assessment of Spain's intentions became bleaker. He was, as Roosevelt said at the time, "bent on peace."[633]

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[630] William McKinley, "State of the Union Address, December 5, 1898," in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897,*ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902).

[631] Modern assessments suggest an internal explosion triggered the explosion. However flawed was the Naval Court of Inquiry, it appears it was wholly uninfluenced by McKinley's administration. Rickover, *How the Battleship Maine Was Destroyed*; Peifer, *Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents*, 21.

[632] In late March, even the spectacular nature of the Maine incident did not change the administration's belief that Spain could still take action that would mean the "*Maine* loss may be peacefully settled" and that the "great forbearance and self-restraint" of Americans would prevail over the controversy. Mr. Day to Mr. Woodford, March 20, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 695.

[633] Quoted in Michael Blow, *A Ship to Remember: The Maine and the Spanish-American War* (William Morrow, 1992), 30. His administration had asked the country to withhold judgment and wait for the facts to come out. A White House statement was careful to avoid attributing any blame on Spain. Some sympathetic newspapers even praised McKinley's sobriety as putting national interest above politics; most, however, described it as craven passivity. Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, chapter 17.

Private diplomatic correspondence suggests that, in the spring of 1898, the most pressing matters for McKinley were not consumed by the controversies of the moment. These controversies only heightened his sense of urgency regarding the continued deterioration of the situation on the island and his grave concerns with Spain's increasingly transparent refusal to adapt her objectives to McKinley's terms for a peaceful settlement. In a telegram to Woodford on the *Maine* situation, Day said that the President believes that what is most important is the

> general conditions in Cuba which can not be longer endured, and which will demand action on our part, unless Spain restores honorable peace which will stop starvation of people and give them opportunity to take care of themselves, and restore commerce now wholly lost… . Relations will be much influenced by attitude of Spanish Government in Maine matter, but general conditions must not be lost sight of.[634]

The President's fears were heightened by the sense of certainty that time was allied with misery. For weeks, Woodford expressed the administration's worry that, once the rainy season begins in mid-April, famine and epidemics would deteriorate already bleak conditions on the ground and heighten dangers to the American homeland.[635] These concerns, expressed in private, had nothing to do with the supposed posturing of jingoes who sought to "sell" a strategic war on humanitarian pretenses.[636]

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[634] Mr. Day to Mr. Woodford, March 20, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 692.
[635] Mr. Woodford to Mr. Sherman, March 2, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*.
[636] For example, according to Tone, "What made 1898 most 'splendid' from the point of view of the American jingoes who wanted a war for economic, political, and strategic reasons is that the twin tragedies of reconcentration and the *Maine* mobilized their countrymen. The jingoes could have their way under the guise of a humanitarian mission to save Cuba and avenge the *Maine*." Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895–1898, (Envisioning Cuba)*, 249. Even if true, there is no indication that McKinley simply yielded or bought into such deceptions.

While McKinley's continued hope for Spain to commit to a program that culminated in a relinquishment of the island seems naïve in hindsight, the public pressure at the time may have made it *more* likely. In Madrid, the outcry over the sunk battleship provoked renewed urgency to avoid war with the United States. Following the incident, the Sagasta government toned down its belligerent brinkmanship and considered seriously selling the island (an alternative that had been periodically entertained by the administrations of Polk, Pierce, Grant, and Cleveland), or reaching an agreement through direct peace talks with the rebels.[637]

Any sincere hope by members of the Sagasta cabinet and the queen regent to proceed down such paths were dashed by deep fears that relinquishment would spell the end of the dynasty. The Spanish had lost a vast empire in the nineteenth century; of its remaining colonies—Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and few small islands in Asia—Cuba was the crown jewel.[638] Thus, despite a massive debt burden, Spain rejected a March 1 offer by insurgents to buy independence for $200 million. As to a negotiated settlement with the insurgents, Spanish officers in Cuba indicated that they were ready to disobey any peace settlement by their civilian superiors that did not begin with the absolute surrender of the Cuban rebels.

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[637] Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 78–85.

[638] *The Nation*, published by anti-war Irish-born journalist Edwin Lawrence Godkin, aptly summarized Spain's predicament: "The Spanish people are as patriotic a race as ever lived. The impulse of a splendid past is still upon them. Traditions of national valor, dating from a time when their infantry swept Europe and their natives drove the dreaded Turk from the Mediterranean are a part of their life-blood. Threatened bankruptcy, certain defeat in the long run, will not for a moment deter that proud nation from fighting for its honor…. We must not deceive ourselves at this point. Spain is no doubt anxious for peace. She will no doubt make every concession to us or to the Cubans compatible with her dignity and honor as a nation. But if driven into a corner she will unquestionably fight." "The Situation in Spain." *The Nation*, March 3 1898.

Noting Madrid's situation, Woodford wrote to McKinley ten days after the explosion of *Maine*: "They want peace if they can keep peace and save the dynasty. They prefer the chances of war, with the certain loss of Cuba, to the overthrow of the dynasty."[639] For Spain's leaders, the voluntary relinquishment of Cuba posed a greater risk to the queen's dynasty than the risks of war with the United States. Madrid was now asking for a pause until their parliament reconvenes in May—a transparent scheme to leverage the upcoming rainy season to gain a battlefield edge over the insurgents.[640]

In late March and early April, McKinley's last efforts at diplomacy continued despite his clear-eyed recognition of Madrid's domestic constraints and strategic procrastination.[641] As before, the priorities he articulated—both to his ministers and to Madrid—emphasized the humanitarian conditions in Cuba. On March 25, Day noted that the President "cannot look upon the starvation in Cuba save with horror. The concentration of men, women and children in fortified towns and permitting them to starve is intolerable to a Christian nation geographically so close as ours to Cuba. All this has shocked and inflamed the American

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[639] Woodford told McKinley that he is inclined to believe his counterparts—that the dynasty's power would indeed be jeopardized if it is seen as yielding further to American demands. Mr. Woodford to the President, February 26, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

[640] McKinley effectively tabled the question *Maine*, saying that he was ready to follow a course of action conforming with friendly relations with Spain. See also Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 154.

[641] In describing Madrid's situation, Woodford expressed the importance of perseverance amidst frustration, suggesting Spain "can make further concessions to Cuba through the insular Cuban government and so, possibly, avert war." McKinley would agree with his minister's sentiment. Mr. Woodford to the President, February 26, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 665.

mind, as it has the civilized world."[642] Meanwhile, Woodford conveyed the President's priorities to his counterparts in Madrid, saying that "The United States has not varied its attitude since I came to Spain last September," and has been disappointed with the lack of progress.[643] The "time has come when the United States must, in the interest of humanity and because of the great pressing commercial, financial, and sanitary needs of our country, as that some satisfactory agreement be reached within a very few days which will assure immediate and honorable peace in Cuba." Woodford explained than an honorable peace was inconsistent with American inaction while Madrid continued to attempt to repress the insurgency. As Americans have gradually come to experience the famine and destitution of Cuba,

> humanity and civilization required that peace must be secured and firmly established at once; and that neither the present judgment of the civilized world nor the final judgment of history would excuse the United States in longer permitting the present condition of affairs in an island lying within 100 miles of our coast.[644]

McKinley's terms for a humanitarian peace were now more specific than before. He sought from Madrid an immediate armistice with Cubans, a revocation of the reconcentration policy that remained in operation despite Weyler's official recall, and ("if possible") an agreement that would empower the President to manage arbitration proceedings that would determine the terms by which Spain relinquishes its hold of Cuba. In the meantime, McKinley successfully prevented Congress from moving forward on resolutions demanding Spanish

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[642] Mr. Day to Mr. Woodford, March 26, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* 1898, 704.
[643] Mr. Woodford to Mr. Sherman, March 25, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 698
[644] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 695.

relinquishment of Cuba. At this point, McKinley conveyed little hope in a Spanish about-face, but he continued to regard a diplomatic breakthrough to be preferable to war.[645]

Over the course of McKinley's final diplomatic efforts in late March and early April, it had become clear to him that Spain had no intention of yielding to his demands. On April 1, the *New York Tribune* reported that McKinley's "closest friends" believe that the President "has less confidence in a peaceable outcome."[646] Still, McKinley could have averted war by renegotiating America's position, permitting Spain to see through its rainy-season strategy and fight the rebels to exhaustion. In rejecting the final proposals reaching him, he had indicated his dissatisfaction with that scenario. Those proposals, he knew, were attempts to placate Washington through promises while defeating the insurgents by a war of attrition.[647] If we are to take seriously McKinley's articulated priorities throughout the conflict, he rejected Spain's final overtures because they sought to devastate the insurgents—a strategy that, even

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[645] McKinley was clearly concerned with European reactions to Cuban instability and delay also served McKinley's strategy of preventing Spain from its vigorous efforts to draw in European allies to its cause. Moreover, delay served McKinley's goal in securing Americans on the island who would be caught in a crossfire once war began. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 82.; Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 249–250.

[646] Quoted in Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 81.

[647] The Spanish reply gave little reason to believe that Spain had departed from its belief that it prefers war over the loss of Cuba. Madrid agreed to revoke the reconcentration policy, but did so while justifying their policy and blaming the devastation on the rebel leaders, acting under orders of the Cuban junta established in New York. (Señor Polo de Bernabé to Mr. Day, March 26, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*.) Meanwhile, Sagasta did not hide his hope that delay would give his military time to turn the tide against the rebels. (Mr. Woodford to the President, March 29, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*.) The McKinley administration interpreted Spain's late offers as schemes that only affirmed Madrid's position that it would not cease military operations short of the rebels' complete surrender. On this point, see also Señor Polo de Bernabé to Mr. Sherman, April 1, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*; Mr. Day to Mr. Woodford, April 4, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

if successful, he consistently said he would not countenance due to its humanitarian implications.

On April 11, 1898, McKinley asked Congress for authority to intervene as a neutral in Cuba to establish peace.[648] On April 19, Congress agreed, empowering the President to enforce a policy of Spanish relinquishment of Cuba.[649] The next day, the two nations broke diplomatic relations and the American consuls were notified to leave Spain at their discretion.[650] On April 21, McKinley ordered a Cuban blockade. On April 25, Spain declared war on the United States and Congress formally reciprocated.

McKinley's so-called "war message" on April 11 is no stemwinder—it contains no patriotic bluster, spirited denunciation of Spain, or any sense of imperial adventurism.[651] Its tone is consistent with interpretations that see it as a strained attempt of a weak-willed president attempting to justify a war in which he does not believe. As was his custom, McKinley portrays his actions as a natural and unfortunate evolution of American diplomacy that began before his presidency. He explicitly invokes Cleveland's warning to Spain about his country's "higher obligations, which we can hardly hesitate to recognize and discharge."[652] Like Cleveland, he says that what is of utmost importance in considering intervention is

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[648] He did not ask specifically for authority to make war, since he had suggested that Spain is free to preemptively surrender her demands should she deice, but it was implied that war was possible, if not likely.
[649] The House vote was 324–19, the Senate 67–21. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, 14; Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires, 1878–1902*, 183.
[650] Mr. Woodford to Mr. Day, April 20, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*.
[651] McKinley's April 11, 1898 message, in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897*, 139–150.
[652] McKinley, 149.

America's national interest in peace to secure domestic liberty and prosperity.[653] McKinley's address was a self-effacing, factual survey of his diplomacy that invites the interpretation that he was forced into war.[654]

Even so, no less than his December congressional message, McKinley's war message underplays his agency, conservatively places his policy in the context of the evolution of American foreign-policy tradition, and underscores the constraints of circumstances—yet doing all that while articulating plainly conditions of acceptable peace that were different from his predecessor's. McKinley's arguments in the war message were entirely consistent with his administration's private and public statements on the matter over the previous ten months. The guiding principle of the President's Cuba policy, from June 1897 to April of 1898, was that the United States had an interest and duty to prevent a peace born of military devastation.[655]

Whereas Cleveland grounded America's "higher obligations" on a highly confined scenario whereby Spain announces in words or deeds its abdication of sovereignty over the

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[653] "[T]the present condition of affairs in Cuba is a constant menace to our peace, and entails upon this government an enormous expense..." "Message Regarding Cuban Civil War, April 11, 1898," in William McKinley, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902).

[654] His speech was roundly mocked by opponents in the press and in Congress for its passivity. Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 273 ff.

[655] Often overlooked is that McKinley's war message makes not one but two formal requests: first, authorization to terminate the internecine war in Cuba; and second, to appropriate funding for the executive to undertake a mission "in the interest of humanity" to supplement civilian charities to alleviate the suffering of Cubans. As he says at the end of his message: "And in the interest of humanity and to aid in preserving the lives of the starving people of the island, I recommend that the distribution of food and supplies be continued, and that an appropriation be made out of the public Treasury to supplement the charity of our citizens." *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 750–760.

island, McKinley suggested that Spain's successful establishment or reestablishment of sovereignty would only heighten America's obligations to intervene—not because the United States is against Spanish victory, *per se*, but because in practice it would mean a devastating conflict *a la* the Ten Years War. "The prospect of such a protraction and conclusion of the present strife is a contingency hardly to be contemplated with equanimity by the civilized world, and least of all by the United States, affected and injured as we are, deeply and intimately, by its very existence."[656] McKinley lists four "grounds for…intervention." Three are about protecting American security and commerce, but he lists the humanitarian reason first:

> First. In the cause of humanity and to put an end to the barbarities, bloodshed, starvation, and horrible miseries now existing there, and which the parties to the conflict are either unable or unwilling to stop or mitigate. It is no answer to say this is all in another country, belonging to another nation, and is therefore none of our business. It is specially our duty, for it is right at our door.[657]

As was by then characteristic, McKinley would assert the paramount importance of American interests in security and commerce while underscoring the deplorable conduct of warfare, noting that "the exercise of cruel, barbarous, and uncivilized practices of warfare, shocked the sensibilities and offended the humane sympathies of our people." Once again, he reminded his audience that, by the time he came into office, "the policy of devastation and concentration" had already been made effective over multiple months and over a large portion of the island.[658] He explicitly reiterated his prior standard of peace and his long-

[656] McKinley, 143.
[657] McKinley, 147.
[658] McKinley, 141.

standing unwillingness to watch Spain subdue the island violently. McKinley recounted that he insisted on an "an immediate and effective amelioration of the condition of the island" through an autonomy plan and the simultaneous enforcement of "more humane methods" during the conduct of hostilities.[659] Despite promising gestures by Madrid, McKinley said he remained deeply concerned with the humanitarian situation, which he said provoked him in December to campaign for a civilian effort to relieve suffering on the island. McKinley does not say, but he does come close to saying, that humanitarian reasons alone justify intervention:

> The forcible intervention of the United States as a neutral to stop the war, according to the large dictates of humanity and following many historical precedents where neighboring states have interfered to check the hopeless sacrifices of life by internecine conflicts beyond their borders, is justifiable on rational grounds.[660]

McKinley's message was a rejection of Cleveland's insistence that American foreign policy must pursue interest in accord the nation's sovereign legal duties to Spain. Short of a deliberate and irreversible destruction of Cuba, Cleveland had regarded humanitarian considerations as subservient to American obligations to the sovereign law of nations. He had argued that American fulfillment of its duties to Spanish sovereignty presented an opportunity for the nation to show its integrity and fidelity to the law of nations. He regarded American filibusterers as well-meaning traitors whose only virtue was in providing the United States

[659] McKinley, 142.
[660] McKinley, 147.

with an opportunity, through their prosecution, to prove a national commitment to neutrality. In contrast, McKinley, goes out of his way to speak of the "burdensome and costly nature of such obligations" represented by the enforcement policy, and as provoking "irritating questions and entanglements" that the United States is eager to escape.[661] In other words, McKinley accepted the propriety of Cleveland's anti-filibustering policy, but, unlike his predecessor, showed little pride in it, and little shame in those whom it targeted; indeed, McKinley viewed the liberation from the burdens of legal compliance as a significant bonus to intervention in Cuba.

In recounting the failure of Cleveland's 1896 attempt to mediate peace, McKinley suggests that the culprit was the prioritization of Spanish sovereignty. Cleveland had sought an honorable settlement "on the basis of some effective scheme of self-government for Cuba under the flag and sovereignty of Spain."[662] This course was doomed, says McKinley, because it ruled out "any plan of settlement which did not begin with the actual submission of the insurgents to the mother country."[663]

McKinley does not say that he believes Cubans deserve recognition or independence as a matter of right or expediency. On the contrary, he repeats his opposition to recognizing the rebels (or an independent Cuban republic) because it is a back-door attempt to create an alliance with the Cuban cause while forcing the United States to a position of neutrality that

[661] McKinley 148.
[662] McKinley, 140.
[663] Of course, Cleveland had determined that this was the only outcome consistent with America's duty to the sovereign law of nations.

would only hurt the Cubans. Unlike Cleveland, who saw Cuban recognition as a brazenly illegal pretense, McKinley's argument against recognition and independence was largely based on the practical consideration that it would unduly harm Cubans and constrain American action. McKinley now added that recognition would constrain America's conduct *during* its interference by endowing premature authority to an undetermined Cuban government.[664] On the eve of war, the question of Cuban recognition or independence must yield to America's primary objective of "the instant pacification of Cuba and the cessation of the misery that afflicts the island."[665]

The supposedly overwhelming public demand for war and the outrage over the *Maine* explosion—those pressures so often presented by scholars as the spark that lit the flames of war—are unmentioned until the end of McKinley's message, and seem to be wholly subservient to his overriding purpose to achieving a humanitarian peace. Rather than directly blaming Spain for the "inexpressible horror" of the *Maine* explosion, McKinley presents it as "a patent and impressive proof of a state of things in Cuba that is intolerable" and the inability of Spain to assure the safety of its harbors during peacekeeping missions.[666]

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[664] "Such recognition is not necessary in order to enable the United States to intervene and pacify the island. To commit this country now to the recognition of any particular government in Cuba might subject us to embarrassing conditions of international obligation toward the organization so recognized. In case of intervention our conduct would be subject to the approval or disapproval of such government. We would be required to submit to its direction and to assume to it the mere relation of a friendly ally." McKinley, 146.

[665] McKinley, 144.

[666] McKinley acknowledges that the naval court of inquiry did not place responsibility on any party. McKinley, 148.

It would be an exaggeration to say that McKinley's war message rationalized intervention on purely humanitarian grounds. In appropriating American resources and risking American lives, he justified his action on the primacy of American security and prosperity. However, it would also be an exaggeration to say that this was an address that uses humanitarian concerns as ancillary, rhetorical window-dressing. At the end of his message, McKinley encapsulates the mixture of his motives that is prompting intervention: "The only hope of relief and repose from a condition which can no longer be endured is the enforced pacification of Cuba. In the name of humanity, in the name of civilization, in behalf of endangered American interests which give us the right and the duty to speak and to act, the war in Cuba must stop."[667] McKinley's articulated mixture of motives is unambiguously consistent with his initial insistence on not just peace and order but peace and order consistent with humanitarian standards. These were standards absent in his predecessor's diplomacy, which was scrupulously guided by America's obligation to international law and that law's protection of Spanish sovereignty. McKinley's initial stance on the situation implied an outright rejection of Cleveland's policy of noninterference based on American duty to Spanish sovereignty. This stance coincided with an affirmative policy of interference—first diplomatically and now militarily—based on an American duty to humanity.

Once war commenced, McKinley toured the country and delivered multiple speeches that effectively removed the finer points of his intentions and established America's cause as a

[667] McKinley, 164.

noble, God-ordained enterprise primarily on behalf of humanity. On October 11, 1898, speaking to a crowd in Cedar Rapids, McKinley said the war and its settlement would bring burdens, but the "American people never shirk a responsibility and never unload a burden that carries forward civilization. We accepted war for humanity. We can accept no terms of peace which shall not be in the interest of humanity."[668] McKinley added that the "real honor" in America's conduct exceeds military valor—it comes with "the substantial gain to humanity."[669] Speaking in Belle Plaine later that day, McKinley said: "This war has taught us a great many lessons, and one of the most priceless connected with the conflict has been the triumph of our humanity. …What we want, my fellow-citizens, is that the conclusion of this war, as written in public treaty, shall be a triumph for humanity."[670] In his December 1898 annual address, while reflecting on his decision to go to war, he acknowledged the nation's interest in stability in Cuba. However, he once again emphasized the war's cause as a nation's "earnest and unselfish endeavors to fulfill a duty to humanity by ending a situation the indefinite prolongation of which had become insufferable." The decision emerged after he had established Spain was not a serious partner in pacifying Cuba humanely, relying instead on the

668 William McKinley, "Speech at Cedar Rapids, Iowa, October 11, 1898," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1893), 87.
669 McKinley, 87.
670 William McKinley, "Speech at Belle Plaine, Iowa, October 11, 1898," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1893), 89–90.

"most objectionable and offensive policies." American initiative was necessary to end conditions "repugnant to the universal sentiment of humanity," he said.[671]

There is no doubt that, before the war and especially after the *Maine* incident, McKinley was facing intense pressure from a large part of the public, Congress, and the press to take more aggressive action against Spain. There is also no doubt that, in the speeches following the onset of war, McKinley spoke much more forcefully of a humanitarian imperative. However, as we have learned, McKinley's standards of a just peace were first articulated in the summer of 1897, guided his subsequent diplomacy, and became the basis by which he determined that his standards for peace were unreachable. By April, McKinley seemed to doubt the possibility of any breakthrough as Spain had revealed her unwillingness to yield to Cuban demands and her determination to pacify the island militarily. As his ministers suggested, the President feared that further engagement with an obstinate Spanish government would come at the cost of near-certain deterioration of conditions in Cuba. Throughout this ten-month period, McKinley indicated that he sought a peace that was inconsistent with Spain's objectives of pacifying the island militarily and that he would end diplomacy once "longer forbearance has ceased to be a virtue."

[671] "Second Annual Address, December 6, 1898," in McKinley, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897*, 161–2.

THE ACQUISITION OF THE PHILIPPINES (1898–1900)

In January of 1899, Senator George F. Hoar, a Republican and supporter of McKinley's Cuba intervention, represented the voice of a growing and estimable minority of dissenters when he rose to speak to his Senate colleagues. Hoar excoriated the President for launching the nation on an unconstitutional policy that imposes on a foreign people an American government they had violently rejected. "You have no right at the cannon's mouth to impose on an unwilling people your Declaration of Independence and your Constitution and your notions of freedom and notions of what is good," Hoar cried.[672]

McKinley had kept his promise to free Cuba and avoid any attempt to annex the island. During the war, strategic considerations had convinced him to take Puerto Rico and other Spanish territories. The acquisition of the Philippines, however, was far more controversial, turning many of McKinley's erstwhile allies against his administration.

What led McKinley to take over an archipelago six thousand miles away from the U.S. homeland that was protected by a Spanish naval squadron that posed little direct threat to American security? More puzzlingly, what led him to establish total military control after reaching an armistice with Spain and assume for the United States the responsibility for the entire archipelago?

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[672] United States Congress, "Acquisition of Territory," 55th Congress, 3rd Session, January 9, 1899," in *Congressional Record*, 1899).

The Context

For many scholars, McKinley's policy of total acquisition of a Pacific archipelago betray the ugly roots of the Spanish-American War. According to these studies, the Philippines acquisition is the best proof that McKinley's philanthropic mission was a veil covering irrepressible strategic and commercial needs.[673] According to one line of arguments, the acquisition was the logical outcome of growing concern over the future of American commerce in the Far East, and a fulfillment of a need for a gateway to the Chinese market.[674] The combination of a highly productive economy and the insatiable need for raw materials and investment opportunities compelled U.S. policy to turn to Asia.[675] Overlapping with this theory is one that argues that McKinley was fulfilling the great dreams of the overeager imperialists, such as Roosevelt and Lodge.[676] Historian Gerald Linderman describes this attitude: "The War of 1898 was not an accident.…Americans, and no one else, must be masters of the cross-roads of the Pacific."[677] According to Schoonover, "The acquisition of the Philippines

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673 The exception to this tendency can be found in the decade after his assassination, while his legacy still enjoyed a honeymoon. At that point, historians acknowledged McKinley's humanitarian impulses, such as claiming that he was "the first of our Presidents to respond to the call of a broad philanthropy towards other less fortunate people." Quoted in Ephraim K. Smith, "William McKinley's Enduring Legacy: The Historiographical Debate on the Taking of the Philippine Islands," *Crucible of Empire: The Spanish-American War & Its Aftermath* (1993), 211.

674 LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion*, *1860–1898*, 362; Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands*, 228.

675 Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization*, chapter 6.

676 Paolo Enrico Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," in *Threshold to American internationalism; essays on the foreign policies of William McKinley* (New York: Exposition Press, 1970).

677 F. Linderman Gerald, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War* (University of Michigan Press, 1974), 235.

was related to one hundred years of U.S. activity in the Pacific and four centuries of quest by North Atlantic maritime powers for Asian trade."[678] Some scholars argue that McKinley was pursuing these objectives deliberately because he shared the concerns and dreams of imperialists; others argue McKinley was driven to do so, either by the pressures of business interests or by an imperialist *zeitgeist*, and a crusading, highly racial progressivism.[679] Michael H. Hunt, for example, suggests that McKinley acquired the Philippines for the same reason that Roosevelt and Lodge approved of it and that he shared Beveridge's belief in redeeming the Filipinos from barbarity through missionary Anglo-Saxon uplift.[680]

In assessing the merits of these theories, we must begin by acknowledging the relative dearth of data regarding McKinley's decisions during the war. Before the war's onset, McKinley's intentions are revealed in his extended and detailed public messages and private diplomatic efforts (sometimes through his ministers speaking on his behalf). For obvious reasons, war evokes the secretive privileges of the executive office; many decisions emerge from deliberations that are limited to tight circles of commanders and ministers. At that point, di-

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[678] Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization*, 97.

[679] As Grenville and Young put it, "his attitude to the question for taking the Philippines is used as a classical illustration of the influence of politics and public opinion on the formation of American policy." (Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 285.). Anti-imperialists like Andrew Carnegie became vocal opponents of policy, but, if congressional roll-calls are any indication, they remained a minority. It seems that McKinley's wartime standing remained high in 1898. The 1898 midterms elections were mixed—Democrats made gains in the House and Republicans gained in the Senate—but were considered a positive reflection of McKinley's wartime presidency. See Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 325.

[680] Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 40–41, 81.

plomacy is terse, words are guarded, and the success of war efforts take precedence over extended public deliberation. Thus, McKinley's intentions in the summer of 1898 were far more opaque than they are in the preceding months before the war. Many observers have therefore sought (not unreasonably) to infer McKinley's intentions by assessing the relevant pressures and interests of the time, or by evaluating second-hand accounts.[681] In truth, we know remarkably little about what McKinley thought about the extent to which the acquisition of the Philippines fit into any plans for America's global role. Insofar as McKinley was silent, it is a silence that must inspire inferential humility rather than creativity.

That said, beginning especially with the August 1898 armistice with Spain and the September peace commission's convention, McKinley had become much more vocal about his intentions, especially as he toured the Midwest and South, and explained what considerations led to his decision to take control of the distant archipelago. McKinley's explanations deserve attention, not least because, in contrast to what many of his critics believed, he was deeply engaged and involved with every major decision during the war. McKinley would rely on his advisers and military commanders to manage the conflict's minutiae, and he (like

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[681] Several prominent studies argue that 1898 and 1899 was a culmination of a calculated pursuit of empire and commercial expansion. While not necessarily treating McKinley's as a powerless agent of interests, they largely avoid inquiry into McKinley's own stated intentions, instead insinuating his intentions by pointing to much less ambiguous articulations of interests (such as the business community) or the apparently irrepressible public pressure bearing on the White House. For example, according to Offner, McKinley favored expansion because he found the islands strategically valuable, and he hoped that in tabling a decision the islands' fate the American public would come around to a similar view. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895–1898,* 223. See also Fry, "William McKinley and the Coming of the Spanish-American War: A Study of the Besmirching and Redemption of an Historical Image."; Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*.; Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*.

most at the time) had little knowledge of the situation in the Far East prior to the war. However, he quickly became a dedicated student of the situation there, and his judgments about American interests and duties became the primary direction of the policy, penetrating a sea of countervailing voices.[682] Many of his recent biographers have remarked on the admirable way in which he supervised operations closely, facilitated deliberation in a way that would compel his advisers to find problems with their own ideas, and moved quickly to replace subordinates when they lost his trust.[683] As he was prone to do, McKinley would command strongly while underplaying his agency, eventually saying that "events had governed him" in the Philippines.[684] In fact, McKinley very much governed events. As Paolo E. Coletta puts it: "In directing both the Spanish war and the peace negotiations…he was the opposite of the milksop: no one was more responsible than he for the character of the peace treaty and the acquisition of the Philippines."[685]

Although McKinley assumed his wartime constitutional powers and duties with authority, he was not implementing the grand strategic plan imputed to his actions in hindsight. In the first place, the extent to which McKinley sympathized with the Roosevelts

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[682] According to one report, McKinley said: "When we received the cable from Admiral Dewey telling of the taking of the Philippines I looked up their location on the globe. I could not have told where those darned islands were within 2,000 miles!" H.H. Kohlsaat, *From McKinley to Harding: Personal Recollections of Our Presidents* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 68.
[683] Healy, "McKinley as Commander-in-chief," 99–100.; Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*.
[684] McKinley to Philippine Commissioner Jacob G. Schurman, quoted in David F. Trask, *The War With Spain in 1898* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 454.
[685] Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," 123.

Lodges of his party is far from clear.[686] There are some (though somewhat incidental) indications that he shared their worldview, at least in outline.[687] Following the onset of war and through the following year, McKinley spoke more grandly about America's global destiny than he had previously. Lodge and Roosevelt, it must be said, emerged mostly satisfied with McKinley's decisions regarding the Philippines.[688] On the whole, however, the actual acquisition of the Philippines had almost nothing to do with the sort of visions attributed to Roosevelt or Lodge or any of the other late nineteenth- to early-twentieth-century voices who most loudly championed American expansionism.[689]

In truth, neither McKinley nor anyone else in May of 1898 knew that the United States would emerge victorious over Spain in just 113 days, let alone acquire distant dependencies. Nor was there any tradition (as there was, say, in Hawaii) of interest by American missionaries and merchants in greater American involvement in the archipelago.[690] There is

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[686] McKnight Nichols Christopher, *Promise and Peril* (Harvard University Press, 2011), 37.

[687] Responding to one of Roosevelt's speeches, McKinley said, "I suspect that Roosevelt is right, and the only difference between him and me is that mine is the greater responsibility." Quoted in Morris Edmund, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (Modern Library, 2010), 591. It is reasonable to infer (though the evidence is relatively thin) that McKinley, like most Republicans of the day, understood and sympathized with those who saw potential for a greater role for America in the Orient. As Gould puts it, "President McKinley never did set down a comprehensive statement of his position on America's role in the Orient; but he believed, as did many of his countrymen, that good business and proper morality fuse when western goods and Christian morality penetrated the Far East." Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 96–97.

[688] On May 24, 1898, Lodge wrote to Roosevelt, "Unless I am utterly and profoundly mistaken, the administration is now fully committed to the large policy that we both desire." Quoted in Christopher, *Promise and Peril*, 37. See also Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, chapter 21.

[689] Roosevelt was eager to shoulder the responsibility for what were McKinley's decisions Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 278.

[690] According to LaFeber, "The interests of missionaries and of investors who believed the islands had great natural wealth no doubt encouraged McKinley to demand the Philippines." (LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 411. However, LaFeber does not explain why this is beyond doubt. Instead, he casts doubt on his own interpretation by quoting Mark Hanna as saying he knew the com-

no evidence that, before the spring of 1898, anyone inside or outside the administration looked upon the Philippines as a stepping-stone to the Chinese market.[691] Neither Congress nor the American public foresaw that a war with Spain would transform America's commercial activity in the Far East, which at the time comprised approximately two percent of America's total trade.[692] There is little evidence that potential for trading opportunities factored in any significant ways into McKinley's decisions before or even during the war.[693] The United States had no office of colonial affairs and no colonial administrators standing by to assume post in the Far East.[694] As Grenville and Young conclude, McKinley "left no evidence" that he considered taking the Philippines prior to the war with Spain.[695] If McKinley had connived to acquire the Philippines before the war, it must be regarded as the best-kept conspiracy in American history.

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mercial benefit of the islands, and then asserting that McKinley followed Mahan's view of "Manila as a way station to the Orient"—even though neither Hannah nor Mahan were involved in McKinley's decisions, and their ideas were absent from deliberations relating to the acquisition of the Philippines.

[691] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 268–269.

[692] Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," 148.

[693] The evidence to the contrary is quite thin. See, for example, LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, 361–362, 408. Contrast with Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley*, 96.; Hamilton, *President McKinley, War and Empire*, volume I and II.; Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, chapters 10, 18, 20.; Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, chapter 10.

[694] Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," 43.

[695] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 286.

The acquisition of the Philippines did not emerge from any Mahan-led seminar in grand strategy. On the other hand, nor was it an impulsive move made in "a fit of absent-mindedness," as Robert Osgood once said.[696] Rather, it was the culmination of iterative steps taken in the winding roads of war—an attempt to emerge victorious against Spain on the most favorable terms, and yet in a way consistent with the war's initial, humanitarian aims.

The initial push of the locomotive was Commodore Dewey's masterful May 1 attack on the Spanish Pacific Squadron in Manila Bay—an operation that would become a byword for American expansion in the Pacific. As Grenville and Young explain, "Dewey's victory proved to be worth more than all Mahan's books put together."[697] That breathtaking defeat of the Spanish navy initiated a series of events that would expand American commitments in the Far East. However, these were implications, not the methodical implementation of any imperialist strategy. Merry explains that the naval victory "brought forth a kind of serendipitous imperialism—the acquisition almost by accident of strategic territory in far-flung regions of the world, the result of actions by people who had other ends in mind and who hadn't contemplated what they would do with such rewards of victory."[698]

The earliest military plan for sailing to Manila was devised in 1896 by the Naval War College. An obscure naval intelligence officer, William W. Kimball, figured that destroying

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[696] Quoted in LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898*, xvii. It is worth pointing out that this was not necessarily the first major foray of America in Asia. The acquisitions of Alaska, Samoa, and Hawaii occurred earlier. But it was undoubtedly of major consequence to American global strategic and commercial outreach in the twentieth century, not least because it prompted a revision of American capabilities and global obligations.
[697] Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 290.
[698] Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 291.

Spain's weak pacific squadron would secure the American west coast while hemorrhaging Spain's revenue sources on the islands.[699] In other words, it was a plan that had everything to do with expediting victory over Spain, should war break out; it did not involve Roosevelt or Lodge and had nothing to do with the imperialism of the era's ambitious strategists.[700] Insofar as control of the Philippines was viewed in a longer, strategic timeline of America's naval outreach, it arose from concerns of naval officers of possible imminent and strategic dangers from Japan, not opportunities in China or any abstract sense of counter-balancing influence in Asia.[701] These officers, tasked with planning American victory over Spain, "never dreamed that the American Army would be sent to capture and hold the principal islands."[702] In sum, Commodore Dewey was sent to his station in Hong Kong in December of 1897 as part of the Navy's plan to defeat Spain in a war, should McKinley's diplomacy fail to secure to peace. When the United States Navy sailed to Manila, it was under a narrowly tailored operation to help defeat Spain in a war; there was no plan to annex or to place the archipelago under American control.[703]

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[699] Healy, "McKinley as Commander-in-chief," 89.; Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 272.

[700] In fact, Kimball's plan was an implicit rebuke of Mahan's naval teachings. Had the famous officer and historian known of it (and he probably did not), it is unlikely that he would have approved of it, since he had doubted the benefits of expending American resources to annex a strategically non-vital area. In contrast to the plan's designers, Mahan was more concerned with strategic threats from China than Japan. Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 292–293; Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization*, 96.

[701] These officers assumed Manila would eventually be returned to Spain in a post-war settlement since, in their view, the remote location was detached from any conceivable American interest. Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 272.

[702] Grenville and Young, 276.

[703] Healy, "McKinley as Commander-in-chief," 89.

Once Dewey's deed was done, McKinley was, quite simply, unsure about the next steps. The President, like most in Washington at the time, never seriously considered America's role in the Philippines' until after Dewey's victory.[704] As Merry explains, "McKinley didn't know what he wanted there. More important, he didn't know enough about the islands to know what he should want."[705] On May 19, McKinley ordered the U.S. army to occupy the Philippines "for the twofold purpose of completing the reduction of the Spanish power in that quarter and of giving to the islands order and security while in the possession of the United States."[706] In the meantime, McKinley's self-awareness of his ignorance compelled him to undertake a deep study of the region, and grapple with the complicated questions of occupation and political settlement that apparently he had never given serious thought. On August 4, the French ambassador Jules-Martin Cambon, who was serving as an intermediary between Spain and the United States, met with the President. He reported: "[T]he question of the Philippines was the only one which was not definitely resolved in his mind."[707] Assessing the available evidence, Merry draws a judicious conclusion about the President's cautious incrementalism regarding the question of American acquisition of the

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[704] Healy, 91.
[705] Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 327.
[706] "Executive Order," May 19, 1898, in McKinley, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897.*
[707] Ministerio de Estado, The War in Cuba: Being a Full Account of Her Great Struggle for Freedom Containing a Complete Record of Spanish Tyranny and Oppression. Daring Deeds of Cuban Heroes and Patriots. Together With a Full Description of Cuba, Its Great Resources. (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1896), 216.

islands: "McKinley was genuinely conflicted on the question. He wanted more time to ponder it, more information to bolster his thinking, and full flexibility of decision making. His approach gave him all three."[708]

McKinley's deliberation over the vexatious situation consistently defaulted to erring on the side of American control and deferment of final determinations to a post-war diplomatic settlement between Spain and the United States. In July, McKinley ordered "the occupation by the United States of the city, bay, and harbor of Manila pending the conclusion of a treaty of peace which should determine the control, disposition, and government of the Philippines."[709] As Spain was losing its hold on its island and a simmering insurgency grew in force, he professed to favor "the general principle of holding on to what we get."[710] His August peace terms determined to keep American troops in place pending a final agreement over the government of the Philippines.[711] Recognizing the plethora of difficulties of any joint-occupation shared with the insurgency, McKinley instructed the military to unilaterally preserve peace and stability, even if it means suppressing the insurgency. The commanders in the Philippines were ordered to "use whatever means in your judgment are necessary to this end."[712] A few weeks later, McKinley told the peace commission: "While we are conducting

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[708] Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 312.
[709] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 904.
[710] Quoted in Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 285; Morgan, *William McKinley and His America*, 295.
[711] Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," 125.
[712] McKinley to Major-General Merrit, August 17, 1898, in McKinley, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897.*

war and until its conclusion we must keep all we get; when the war is over we must keep what we want."[713] On October 26, five weeks after the insurgency formed its constitutional assembly and drafted an interim constitution, McKinley called his administration to execute a policy of total acquisition. His reasoning: pending a final peace treaty between the United States and Spain, only the United States can establish order.

McKinley's Case for Annexation of the Philippines

Several months prior to his assassination in September of 1901, McKinley would describe his decision regarding the Philippines in terms similar to future historians—as inaugurating a new era of American power, leaving behind "a spirit of isolation" that dominated since at least the Mexican War. McKinley called it "one of the best things we ever did" because merely capturing "a coaling-station or an island" would have made the United States "the laughing-stock of the world." He boasted that his decision had made his nation a "world power; and I know, sitting here in this chair, with what added respect the nations of the world now deal with the United States, and it is vastly different from the conditions I found when I was inaugurated."[714]

Such far-reaching purposes were not so evident in 1898 when McKinley took steps to put the archipelago under American control. Why? To a cynical eye, McKinley's decision to order U.S. control of the islands, even while conceding Spain's *de jure* sovereignty until a

[713] Quoted in Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," 128–29.
[714] Sumner Olcott Charles, *The Life of William McKinley* (1916), vol. II, 309.

treaty is signed, appears as a duplicitous pursuit of the commercial spoils of war. Evidence that McKinley followed a profit motive in the Pacific is suggested in his then-secret instructions to the peace commission in September of 1898:

> Incidental to our tenure in the Philippines is the commercial opportunity to which American statesmanship cannot be indifferent. It is just to use every legitimate means for the enlargement of American trade; but we seek no advantages in the Orient which are not common to all. Asking only the open door for ourselves, we are ready to accord the open door to others. The commercial opportunity which is naturally and inevitably associated with this new opening depends less on large territorial possession than upon an adequate commercial basis and upon broad and equal privileges.[715]

McKinley's recognition of the commercial opportunity in the Philippines no doubt was shaped in part by the tutoring of General Francis V. Greene, whose army service was followed by a successful business career in New York. Greene had studied the Philippines exhaustively and, in September, issued a report to McKinley that presented the Philippines as ripe for American annexation. Greene wrote that the rich mineral resources on the islands are "very valuable," with cigars nearly as good as the best in Cuba and a coffee industry that can be easily revived. "With these islands in our possession and the construction of railroads in the interior of Luzon, it is probable that an enormous extension could be given this commerce, nearly all of which would come to the United States," wrote Greene.[716] However,

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[715] "Correspondence With the United States Peace Commissioners at Paris, 1898: Instructions to the Peace Commissioners, September 16, 1898," in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1898, 907.
[716] P.V. Greene, "Philippine Islands; Their People, Productions, and Commerce, August 30, 1898," in *Monthly Summary of the Imports and Exports of the United States for the Fiscal Year*, ed. United States Department of the Treasury U.S. Government Printing Office, 1902), 34.

there was one catch: these considerable economic opportunities depended on a central government capable of maintaining the cohesion of a "one and inseparable" archipelago that would otherwise be disintegrated by the deeply-rooted ethnic and political divisions.

Was McKinley's policy of acquisition guided by Greene's optimistic analysis? It is possible. However, McKinley never articulated the extent to which the "enlargement" of American trade conformed to the expansive vision of Greene, or whether it was closer to a much more limited plan, such as a small commercial depot or a naval station envisioned by the Naval War Board with whom he had been deliberating.[717] What *is* clear, however, is that McKinley did not emphasize these commercial considerations, nor did he equate American predominance with the commercial benefits of annexation. In fact, as we shall see, he repeatedly treated the situation as an obligation rather than an opportunity, insisting that he "didn't want the Philippine Island," and that he had acquired them due to the absence of alternatives.[718] In other words, he not only said explicitly that commercial considerations were "incidental" but, in his private and public justifications, also treated them as such by saying little of them.

[717] Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," 129.
[718] Hofstadter, "Manifest Destiny and the Philippines," 168.

Beyond concluding the war with a victory over Spain, McKinley's primary concern *vis-à-vis* the Pacific was that the archipelago was fragile and susceptible to devastating disintegration from within or exploitative conquest from without.[719] Greene had cautioned: "If the United States evacuate these islands, anarchy and civil war will immediately ensure and lead to foreign intervention."[720] As the insurgency gained in strength, the Spanish government conceded it could no longer guarantee the protection of life and property to the Spanish subjects in the Philippines.[721] To protect the natives, Spain cynically offered to reestablish heavy troop presence.[722] The insurgency, which never accepted an alliance with the United States, was incapable of holding the islands together. Establishing an independent, functional republic was even further out of reach.[723] Even the insurgency's leader would later say that McKinley was wise to insist on total control, for partial annexation could have irreversibly dismembered the archipelago and left it incapable of deterring opportunistic conquest by European powers.[724] McKinley knew, not least from his study of Greene's report, that an absence of a centralized administration with the capability of law enforcement threatened the

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[719] On October 25, 1898, McKinley wrote to Day expressing the "grave problem" in the islands' stability. The President to Mr. Day, October 28, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*. See also Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," 150.

[720] Quoted in Louis J. Halle, *The United States Acquires the Philippines: Consensus vs. Reality* (University Press of America, 1985), 198.

[721] Mr. Cambon to Mr. Day, August 29, 1898. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 808–809.

[722] Mr. Moore to Mr. Thiebaut, September 5, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 810–811.

[723] Whitelaw Reid, *Making Peace With Spain: The Diary of Whitelaw Reid, September-December, 1898* (University of Texas Press, 1965), 105–106.

[724] "And yet, in retrospect, I cannot help but be glad that the expansionists won over McKinley completely. For the alternative to annexing the Philippines entirely might have been partition. The Philippines might have been another Poland with Japan annexing the Batanes group in the north, the United States keeping Luzon, Germany grabbing the Visayan Islands, and perhaps Great Britain taking over Mindanao which is proximate to its territory of Borneo. Had the Philippines been dismembered in this or a similar manner, we should have lost

archipelago's stability and prosperity.[725] As Louis J. Halle put it: "For Dewey to have just sailed away, leaving possible chaos and bloodshed in his wake, would have represented an abdication of humane responsibility…. Any administration that had ordered his [Dewey's] immediate return would have committed itself to political disaster and would be remembered in infamy to this day."[726]

McKinley argued that abandoning the archipelago would compromise the initial, humanitarian *casus belli*. Even in his aforementioned, secret instructions to the peace commission mentioning the "incidental" commercial opportunity on the islands, McKinley stressed that the United States foremost duty is to conduct and conclude the war in the same spirit that had initiated it.

> It is my wish that throughout the negotiations entrusted to the Commission the purpose and spirit with which the United States accepted the unwelcome necessity of war should be kept constantly in view. We took up arms only in obedience to the dictates of humanity and in the fulfillment of high public and moral obligations. We had no design of aggrandizement and no ambition of conquest.[727]

The United States, he said later, "was impelled solely by the purpose of relieving grievous wrongs and removing long-existing conditions which disturbed its tranquillity, which shocked the moral sense of mankind, and which could no longer be endured." McKinley

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all chances of becoming a free and independent nation." Emilio Aguinaldo, *A Second Look At America* (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, Publishers, Inc., 1957), 65.

[725] His military commanders and advisers, Greene and Dewey included, had shared their concerns that no Filipino government has a chance to govern independently. Philippine Information Society, *Facts About the Filipinos* (Philippine Information Society, 1901), 31.

[726] Halle, The United States Acquires the Philippines: Consensus vs. Reality, 198.

[727] McKinley, 906.

then exhorted the commissioners to avoid relinquishing the high moral position of the United States:

> It is my earnest wish that the United States in making peace should follow the same high rule of conduct which guided it in facing war. It should be as scrupulous and magnanimous in the concluding settlement as it was just and humane in its original action. The luster and the moral strength attaching to a cause which can be confidently rested upon the considerate judgment of the world should not under any illusion of the hour be dimmed by ulterior designs which might tempt us into excessive demands or into an adventurous departure on untried paths. It is believed that the true glory and the enduring interests of the country will most surely be served if an unselfish duty conscientiously accepted and a signal triumph honorably achieved shall be crowned by such an example of moderation, restraint, and reason in victory as best comports with the traditions and character of our enlightened republic.
>
> Our aim in the adjustment of peace should be directed to lasting results and to the achievement of the common good under the demands of civilization, rather than to ambitious designs….[728]

Defining honorable triumph as one consistent with the "just and humane" *casus belli* rather than "ulterior designs," McKinley's high-minded rhetoric reflected an awkward recognition that the United States would stand to benefit from wielding indefinite influence over the islands. As he acknowledged, "the Philippines stand upon a different basis" than that of Cuba, and thus American action there demands an independent justification. Ultimately, McKinley would reconcile the motives by convincing others, and perhaps also himself, that acquisition was in the best interest of the native inhabitants, even if they did not yet know it, and even if acquisition presents new costs and challenges to the United States. Nonetheless, even before the Tagalog insurgents took up arms against American troops, McKinley regarded American

[728] McKinley, 907.

policy toward the Philippines as a contingency of war that introduced new, moral duties. As he explained at the end of his memo to the commissioners:

> [W]ithout any original thought of complete or even partial acquisition, the presence and success of our arms at Manila imposes upon us obligations which we cannot disregard. The march of events rules and overrules human action. Avowing unreservedly the purpose which has animated all our effort, and still solicitous to adhere to it, we cannot be unmindful that, without any desire or design on our part, the war has brought us new duties and responsibilities which we must meet and discharge as becomes a great nation on whose growth and career from the beginning the ruler of nations has plainly written the high command and pledge of civilization.[729]

McKinley's self-underplay and his transference of responsibility to a disembodied "march of events" would become a prominent theme in his public and private exasperations. According to one report, McKinley at one point expressed frustration that "If old Dewey had just sailed away when he smashed that Spanish fleet, what a lot of trouble he would have saved us."[730] He consistently described his (and his nation's) situation as a moral, even spiritual, test, rather than any kind of calculated opportunity. An observant Methodist ("one of America's most intensely religious presidents," says one historian),[731] McKinley is reported to have said that the agonizing indecision regarding the Philippines ended after prayer and divine counsel.[732] Although that anecdote might be apocryphal, it is consistent with his increasingly religious rhetoric in public. In an October 1899 address, he said the American flag

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[729] "Correspondence With the United States Peace Commissioners at Paris, 1898: Instructions to the Peace Commissioners, September 16, 1898," in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 907.
[730] Quoted in Kohlsaat, *From McKinley to Harding: Personal Recollections of Our Presidents*, 68.
[731] Gary Scott Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office: The Religious Lives of American Presidents* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2015), 60.
[732] Charles, *The Life of William McKinley*, 109–111.

is on the islands because, "in the providence of God, who moves mysteriously, the great archipelago has been placed in the hands of the American people."[733] This, he averred, is a situation for which the United States had not planned nor desired. "It was no responsibility we sought, but it was a responsibility put upon us."[734]

It is tempting to balk at McKinley's moralistic self-pity and projected jeremiads. McKinley could have declared a navy battle won, left Manila City alone, and recalled Dewey. That was a distinct option at the time, and many (including Cleveland) said they wished McKinley would have done just that.[735] Alternatively, he could have sieged Manila temporarily and then, on August 12, when Spain signed a peace protocol and ceasefire, withdrawn American troops and left the problem to the Spanish and the Filipinos.

Rather than disengaging after an initial mistake, McKinley incrementally committed to the protection of the Philippine inhabitants. A preliminary, May 4 dispatch of a force of 12,000 men to hold Manila evolved into offensive operations to rout Spanish forces and contain an insurgency. Practically, this meant the United States would exert unilateral military

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[733] William McKinley, "Speech at Public Reception in Youngstown, Ohio, October 18, 1899," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1893), 342.

[734] McKinley See also William McKinley, "Speech at Dinner of the Home Market Club, Boston, February 16, 1899," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1893), 186–187; "The evolution of events, which no man could control, has brought these problems upon us...The Philippines, like Cuba and Porto Rico [sic], were intrusted to our hands by the war, and to that great trust, under the providence of God and in the name of human progress and civilization we are committed."

[735] "The attack upon the enemy's fleet by Dewey was, [Cleveland] said, of course perfectly right and proper, but, after that, Dewey should have been ordered to join the blockading squadron. He looked with alarm at the acquisition of island territory, and thought that Harmon's view as to the unconstitutionality of the proceeding was important." Gilder, *Grover Cleveland: A Record of Friendship*, 200.

control of the Philippines, restraining any insurgent hostilities, deterring foreign powers (including Spain), and protecting inhabitants pending the hostilities between the United States and Spain.[736] In the view of opponents of America's intervention in Cuba, McKinley was like a physician who committed an initial blunder and sought to escape his conscience by poisoning his patient to death.

McKinley saw it differently. As he would explain in December of 1898, "It was fitting that whatever was to be done in the way of decisive operations in that quarter should be accomplished by the strong arm of the United States alone," since the United States had the obligation to achieve as speedy a peace as possible to prevent needless loss of life.[737] Thus, although he spoke of American control of the islands as something beyond his control, it was the result of his evolving and deeply considered judgment of the alternatives—alternatives that he concluded were inconsistent with "the same high rule of conduct which guided it in facing war."

In the President's public addresses beginning in early fall of 1898, McKinley emphasized the overriding importance of avoiding a hit-and-run war policy by which the United

[736] Mr. Moore to Mr. Thiebaut, September 5, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 810–811.
[737] Second Annual Address, December 5, 1898, in McKinley, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897.*

States dismantles the islands' Spanish defense only to watch them devolve to "chaos and anarchy, after we have destroyed the only government they had."[738] Speaking to a Georgia audience, McKinley explained that once Dewey's deed was done, and the government in Manila was destroyed, it became "the duty of the American people to provide for them a better one." The United States did not hope for such a scenario, but what was convenient for the United States was no longer relevant. For "who will shrink from the responsibility, grave though it may be," to offer guidance and protection to a helpless people?[739] "Are we to sit down in our isolation and recognize no obligation to a struggling people whose present conditions we have contributed to make?" The United States could not abandon its responsibility to "give to the inhabitants protection and also our guidance to a better government, which will secure to them peace and order and security in their life and property and in the pursuit of happiness." McKinley rejected outright any course that would leave the islands in chaos, any alternative that would turn them into the feed of rapacious European powers, such as Germany, Japan, or, indeed, Spain.[740] Speaking to a Boston audience on February

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[738] William McKinley, "Speech at Banquet of Board of Trade and Associated Citizens, Savannah, Georgia, December 17, 1898," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1893), 174.

[739] McKinley, 174.

[740] The United States did not go to war to free the Filipinos from their Spanish rulers. But now that the United States had leverage over the archipelago's future, McKinley believed that Spanish conduct on the island was a relevant consideration. As he well knew, the Spanish may have not interfered with non-Catholic customs on the islands, but Spanish rule in the Philippines was as corrupt, and even more exploitative, than its rule in Cuba. Spain had demonstrated that it approaches the problem of the islands' political and ethnic divisions as one best solved by the notorious iron fist of General Valeriano Weyler, who was appointed governor of Philippines in 1896. Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, chapter 16.

16, 1899, McKinley said that returning Spain her Pacific possessions would have meant tossing the islands "into the arena of the strife of nations." It would be a shameful and selfish disregard. "No true American consents to that….[I]t would have been a weak evasion of duty."[741] The presence of the United States in the Far East was an outcome of wartime necessity that cannot be undone. "It is not a question of keeping the islands of the East, but of leaving them," he said.[742] The only remaining questions concerned a triumph worth of America's high moral position in going to war in the first place. "[W]hatever covenants duty has made for us in the year 1898 we must keep."[743] McKinley stressed that remaining faithful to the war's original, humanitarian aims, meant securing the Philippines, even at great cost.

McKinley spoke of the Philippines as a moral responsibility of war rather than a commercial and strategic boon; his arguments were more subdued and less millenarian than those clerics of the Protestant-Progressive civil religion. The clearest difference between him and the Josiah Strongs and Alfred Beveridges of the day were that, even while he expressed self-assuredness about the justice of his policies, he did not pretend that his decisions were

[741] McKinley, "Speech at Dinner of the Home Market Club, Boston, February 16, 1899," 187–188.
[742] McKinley, "Speech at Banquet of Board of Trade and Associated Citizens, Savannah, Georgia, December 17, 1898," 174.
[743] McKinley, 174.

other than the best among a mass of flawed options.[744] As he told a Boston audience in February of 1899, his decisions were approximations of judgments guided by "an honest effort" consistent with "conscience, justice, and honor."[745] When he spoke of providence, he did so in the context of fulfilling obligations to humanity amidst the unanticipated, evolving consequences of war, and less as affirmative projects of global renewal. Providence, and war, had thrust on the United States a responsibility from which the United States could not shrink without undoing the moral luster of the war's initial basis. "Have the American people ever been known to run away from a high moral duty?"[746] Privately, McKinley intimated the same concerns, saying that that the "well-considered opinion of the majority" would agree with him that "duty requires we should take the archipelago."[747] In an October speech in Chicago, he said: "We cannot escape the obligations of victory…We are bound in conscience to keep and perform the covenants which the war has sacredly sealed with mankind. Accepting war for humanity's sake, we must accept all obligations which the war in duty and honor imposed upon us."[748] McKinley believed that relinquishing the Philippines was impossible "for the very reasons which justified the war." It "would be to escape responsibility for our

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[744] "Our concern was not for territory or trade or empire, but for the people whose interests and destiny, without our willing it, had been put in our hands." McKinley, "Speech at Dinner of the Home Market Club, Boston, February 16, 1899," 188. Later, he added: "No imperial designs lurk in the American mind. They are alien to American sentiment, thought, and purpose. Our priceless principles undergo no change under a tropical sun." McKinley, 92.
[745] McKinley, 191.
[746] McKinley, "Speech at Public Reception in Youngstown, Ohio, October 18, 1899," 342.
[747] The President to Mr. Day, October 28, 1898, in Charles, *The Life of William McKinley*, volume II, 108.
[748] William McKinley, "Speech at the Auditorium, Chicago, October 18, 1898," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1893), 133–134.

own acts and that we could not do; our duty and destiny demanded that we undertake our own responsibilities."[749] Even after extending sovereignty over the whole archipelago and fighting an insurgency, McKinley would deliver speeches describing his policy as a necessary sacrifice to emancipate foreigners.[750]

On September 19, several days after McKinley sent his instructions to the peace commissioner, Senator Beveridge spoke to a Republican crowd in Indiana, encapsulating McKinley's concerns with a rhetorical question: "Would not the people of the Philippines prefer the just, human, civilizing government of this Republic to the savage, bloody rule of pillage and extortion from which we have rescued them?"[751] Unlike commercial and geo-strategic considerations, McKinley never regarded the question posed by Beveridge as "incidental" to the nation's duties in directing a peace consistent with its interests.

Soon, McKinley's intentions to maintain a Philippines policy consistent with the humanitarian motives of war clashed with another moral principle he promised to uphold in Cuba: namely, his avowal to refrain from undemocratic annexation. Like Beveridge, he was led to the conclusion that the rule of liberty "applies only to those who are capable of self-government," and that the highly fractured and turbulent political culture in the archipelago did not fit that category.[752] In February of 1899, McKinley asked a Boston audience:

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[749] McKinley, 133–134.
[750] See, for example, McKinley, "Speech at Dinner of the Home Market Club, Boston, February 16, 1899."; McKinley, "Speech at Public Reception in Youngstown, Ohio, October 18, 1899."
[751] Beveridge, Albert J., "The March of the Flag." *Chicago Tribune*, September 19 1898.
[752] Beveridge.

> Could we, after freeing the Filipinos from the domination of Spain, have left them without government and without power to protect life or property or to perform the international obligations essential to an independent state? Could we have left them in a state of anarchy and justified ourselves in our own consciences and before the tribunal of mankind? Could we have done that in the sight of God or man? . . . We were obeying a higher moral obligation, which rested on us and did not require anyone's consent. [Great applause and cheering] We were doing our duty by them, as God gave us the light to see our duty.[753]

McKinley was well-aware that military annexation did not comport easily with a common-sense view of democratic imperatives. In his mind, the alternative was between an American-made non-democratic order or a weak and hastily formed Filipino congress that would compromise the archipelago's political integrity.

While the incapacity of self-government in Philippines in 1898 had led him and his military commanders to recommend annexation, it had led others, including his secretary of state, William Day, to the conclusion that the United States must avoid committing its resources there. Shortly before McKinley declared total acquisition American policy, Day wrote to the President: "[A]s I have always said to you, the acquisition of the great archipelago with eight or nine millions of absolutely ignorant and many degraded people, with the capacity for supporting a population of fifty millions, seems like a very great undertaking for a country whose pride it is to rest its Government on the consent of the governed."[754] McKinley himself had long cautioned against forgetting democratic procedures "in the race for wealth and commercial supremacy." As McKinley said in a Philadelphia address eight years earlier, no gain is worth the price of a constitutional soul. "Duty must be master and

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[753] McKinley, "Speech at Dinner of the Home Market Club, Boston, February 16, 1899," 189.
[754] Day to McKinley, October 28,1898, in Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," 142.

right supreme. The government of the people must be by the people, and not by a few of the people; it must rest upon the free consent of the governed and all of the governed."[755]

It is likely that McKinley, like most Washington officials, had overestimated the Tagalog gratefulness of American military presence.[756] However, he did little to pretend that the Filipinos had welcomed American military control with open arms. Instead, he underscored a responsibility to the welfare of inhabitants as more important than democratic procedures or any political outcomes on the horizon.[757] On December 21, he announced his "benevolent assimilation" policy. McKinley instructed U.S troops to win the affection of inhabitants by assuring them, as far as possible, the full measure of individual rights of liberal regimes.[758]

That legally dubious proclamation—which supplanted budding efforts of Filipino self-rule with U.S. sovereign imposition—triggered armed conflict between American and Filipino rebels. Throughout 1899, McKinley argued that the American military is preserving

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[755] William McKinley, "New England and the Future: Address at the New England Dinner At the Continental Hotel, Philadelphia, December 22, 1890," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1893), 485.
[756] Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 367.
[757] It is worth pointing out that McKinley had discussed his obligation regarding Cuba in similar terms. Although he held the anti-annexation Teller Amendment as a sacred obligation, he nevertheless maintained the importance of U.S. troop presence until a sufficiently stable Cuban congress was established. Merry, chapter 23.
[758] The proclamation read, in part: "Finally, it should be the earnest wish and paramount aim of the military administration to win the confidence, respect, and affection of the inhabitants of the Philippines by assuring them in every possible way that full measure of individual rights and liberties which is the heritage of free peoples, and by proving to them that the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule." Executive Order, December 21, 1898, in McKinley, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897.*

the most fundamental security of the Filipinos, who would, in time, "bless the American Republic because it emancipated and redeemed their fatherland and set them in the pathway of the world's civilization."[759] He argued that acting in Filipino interests sometimes meant denying them the formalities of democratic consent; democracy is rule by the opinion of the many and that opinion is distorted outside of the context of peace and order. Thus, anarchy is no time to "submit important questioning concerning liberty and government to the liberated while they are engaged in shooting down their rescuers."[760] He mocked any suggestion that the United States needed consent to protect the "the welfare and happiness and the rights of the inhabitants" in the Philippines. "Did we need their consent to perform a great act for humanity?" This was a fulfillment of an unchosen, God-ordained duty undertaken "with the consent of our own consciences and with the approval of civilizations," McKinley said to applause.[761] The United States is acting morally as long as it keeps the interests of the inhabitants in focus. The inhabitants may question the United States now, but in truth, he said, "their good is our aim" and "their welfare is our welfare."[762] McKinley asked: "If we can benefit these remote peoples, who will object?"[763]

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[759] McKinley, "Speech at Dinner of the Home Market Club, Boston, February 16, 1899," 193.
[760] McKinley, 189.
[761] McKinley, 189.
[762] William McKinley, "Speech at Ocean Grove, New Jersey, August 25, 1899," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1893), 210.
[763] McKinley, "Speech at Dinner of the Home Market Club, Boston, February 16, 1899," 192.

Of course, it would be the Filipinos themselves who would object—and object violently. Shortly after Spain signed over its sovereign claims over the Philippines to the United States, the rebels became determined to rout the United States as they had sought to rout Spain. By the middle of 1900, most of the U.S. Army was fighting a war in the Philippines, ultimately costing over 4,200 lives and $600 million, killing more Filipinos in three years than the Spanish government had in three and a half centuries.[764] Not unreasonably, such outcomes have led observers to conclude that, McKinley's words and intentions aside, "the Filipinos were not interested in his conception of duty, humanity, civilization. They were interested in the independence of their country"—and McKinley was unwilling to give it to them.[765]

The American counterinsurgency against Filipino freedom-fighters casts a shadow over McKinley's motives. In 1890, Congressman McKinley said that "Commercial interests and material progress should have our constant concern and our close consideration, but human rights and constitutional privileges must not be forgotten in the race for wealth and commercial supremacy."[766] In 1897, President McKinley repeatedly warned against "forcible annexation" and "wars of conquest," calling them a crime against justice and a betrayal of American democratic principles. But then, in 1898 and 1899, the President was intent on

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[764] Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization*, 93–95.
[765] Foster Rhea Dulles, *America in the Pacific: A Century of Expansion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), 9–10, 224–255.
[766] McKinley, "New England and the Future: Address At the New England Dinner At the Continental Hotel, Philadelphia, December 22, 1890," 485.

waging a war of territorial control and acquisition, and to do so even in the face of stiff native resistance, and even at the cost of great blood and treasure.

In going to war over Cuba, McKinley had listed various and wide-ranging reasons. As the Philippines presented new difficulties, his justifications had become increasingly moralistic—even as his actions cast new doubts on America's high purpose. Observing the dissonance between McKinley's words and actions, many scholars have concluded that McKinley either sought to exploit the war for America's riches, or, less harshly, that he was giving in to overwhelming enthusiasm of holding on to the unexpected gains of war.[767] The leader of the Filipino insurgency said McKinley's annexation policy was an imperialist program in humanitarian décor.[768] In 1911, Admiral French Ensor Chadwick summarized McKinley's troubling decision to take control of the Philippines in this way: "To demand the Philippines was undoubtedly to alter the moral position of the United States and change its attitude from one of altruism to one of self-interest."[769] Schoonover puts it more forthrightly: "U.S. conduct in the Philippines was contrary to the rhetoric justifying it."[770]

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[767] Hofstadter, "Manifest Destiny and the Philippines," 167.

[768] Aguinaldo said that McKinley made into policy the sentiments of Mahan, Lodge, and Roosevelt. Aguinaldo, *A Second Look At America*, 50.

[769] Chadwick, *The Relations of the United States and Spain: Diplomacy*, volume II, 461.

[770] Schoonover, 95. As Walter McDougall explains, this was a rhetoric that conveyed a consensus "that God Almighty was summoning his chosen nation to wage holy humanitarian war against atavistic Catholic tyranny." Schoonover, *Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization*, 95. As Walter McDougall explains, this was a rhetoric that conveyed a consensus "that God Almighty was summoning his chosen nation to wage holy humanitarian war against atavistic Catholic tyranny." McDougall, *The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy: How America's Civil Religion Betrayed the National Interest*, 113.

In a sense, there is nothing unusual about McKinley's increasingly expansionist policy amid narrowing justifications. As historian H.W. Brands observes, "Conflation of causes is a chronic hazard of American (and probably democratic) war-making; in lining up support for belligerence, the bellicose cast their net as widely as feasible, hoping to catch anyone with half a mind for war."[771] But to what extent does the war against Filipinos suggest that McKinley's intentions were driven by a Janus-faced policy of conquest merely sold on humanitarian grounds?

McKinley may have developed a taste for empire after the war with Spain commenced and perhaps especially after it concluded. He may also have shared the military's concern over Japan's rise and the commercial promise of a Pacific foothold. (Of course, if McKinley lived to see that the Philippines would become an unprofitable liability that only threatened American security, perhaps he would have acted differently.) However, as we have seen, while McKinley acknowledged potential benefits in Eastern acquisition, he refrained from elaborating on them or even mentioning them. Instead, and in contrast to the imperialists of the day, he repeatedly said that the whole matter was an unfortunate obligation thrust on the nation from its decision to wage war with Spain. When he acknowledged the material benefits, he said they were "incidental" to peace terms; when he fought the war, he treated them as incidental (largely by being silent about them) when explaining and defending his policy. Indeed, his language emphasized the sacrifice entailed in the obligation of the policy.

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[771] H.W. Brands, "The Idea of the National Interest," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 2 (2002), 43.

Meanwhile, he advocated, both privately and publicly, for a military policy that was consistent with the original humanitarian objectives.[772] He never departed from his justification of his decision to retain Spain's former colonial possessions as a means to a decisive victory consistent with the war's initial humanitarian impulse.[773] Despite a vocal, important, and sizable minority of politicians intellectuals who had turned against McKinley due to his annexation policy, most Americans, it seems, accepted the sincerity of his reasons.[774]

Further, we have little reason to think that McKinley was "pressured" into a military program due to overwhelming political and economic strains. In late 1898, McKinley was a popular president of a nation that just emerged victorious in a war.[775] He could have used his position and his constitutional powers to conduct a foreign policy consistent with the rejection of territorial aims. He could have co-opted the vocal minority that had supported his

[772] As early as May 8, 1898, When he ordered the occupation of the Philippines, he told his secretary of war to avoid disrupting the local natives; the United States was not there to make war on them but "to protect them in their homes, in their employments, and in their personal and religious rights." William McKinley: "Third Annual Message, December 5, 1899," in William McKinley, *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* ((New York: Appleton & Company, 1893). See also See Grenville and Young, *Politics, Strategy, and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873–1917*, 286–287.

[773] This is not to say that McKinley did not have progressive themes in earlier addresses. In contrast to Cleveland, he spoke often of cultural and political advancement and liberation as a God-ordained destiny of mankind. See for example William McKinley, "Address At the Carnegie Library, November 3, 1897," in *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley: From His Election to Congress to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1893), 56.

[774] Merry, *President McKinley: Architect of the American Century*, 471.

[775] Kevin Phillips, *William McKinley: The American Presidents Series: The 25th President, 1897-1901* (Times Books, 2014), 99–100.

decision to go to war but became hostile to his plans for annexation. His peace commissioners and the American people "would no doubt have acquiesced in his decision to pull out of the Philippines," says Coletta. "But he consciously chose to demand their cession."[776]

McKinley described his decisions as the consequences of great pressures—these came not from the public, the business community, or the imperialist wing of his party, but from the consciences of his self, his country, and the "tribunal of mankind." Unwilling to, "in the sight of God or man," abandon the duty he had attached to the nation in launching the war of 1898, he concluded that the United States must protect and rehabilitate a now-defenseless archipelago. Doing so, he said, was the only way for the nation to avoid contradicting "the same high rule of conduct which guided it in facing war."[777]

Eight years after the decision to annex the Philippines, McKinley's bitter, anti-expansion enemy, Senator Hoar, reflected once again on McKinley's conduct regarding Cuba and the Philippines. Despite his strong disagreement with the President at the time, Hoar said that McKinley had committed to a standard of righteous international conduct, and was manipulated only insofar as an individual could be manipulated by his own moral commitments. "I dare say that he was influenced as any other man who was not more than human would have been influenced," wrote Hoar. According to the Massachusetts Senator, McKin-

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[776] Coletta, "The Peace Negotiations and the Treaty of Paris," 150.
[777] "Correspondence With the United States Peace Commissioners at Paris, 1898: Instructions to the Peace Commissioners, September 16, 1898," in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 907.

ley was earnest both in his avowal against "forcible annexation" before the war and his justifications for it after the war. "I have no doubt whatever that in the attitude that he took later he was actuated by a serious and lofty purpose to do right. I think he was led from one step to another by what he deemed the necessity of the present occasion."[778]

[778] George Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1903), volume II, 309.

Conclusion

Since its founding by early realists, modern IR theory has sought to supplant the study of subjective, moral opinions with the science of objective, amoral facts. Early realists exposed "the real basis of the professedly abstract principles commonly invoked in international politics" as the relentless pursuit of fixed interests.[779] Their deterministic scientific method was a deliberate counter-education, an assault on moral "voluntarism," or of evaluation of the "moral qualities of motives."[780] Great destruction is threatened by the belief that human beings can use their wisdom to reform consciousness and apply theoretical truths for the purpose of peace. The realist project was directed at achieving certain political, Western objectives by means of a scientifically sterile pretense. Its primary goal was to educate the student of international politics that "there is little room for meaningful choice on the part of state decisions makers, and even less room for the choice of moral values that conflict with the national interest."[781]

Today, few IR theorists concede the moral purpose of their work, and fewer still question the political purpose of their methods. In the name of rigorous social scientific inquiry and conformity with systematizing methods, analysis of moral purpose in foreign policy is jettisoned prior to the start of inquiry, and the actual content of moral imperatives in foreign policy is left to the silo of a "normative" school concerned with "philosophical values

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[779] Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, 87.
[780] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6.
[781] McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy*, 3.

and metaphorical abstractions," with concerns of "ought" distinguished by their irrelevance to what "is."[782] Insofar as morality is not ignored, IR theorists investigate questions relating to "*how* and *to what degree"* moral justifications conform to social and biological needs, or to what extent they are words "utilized as instruments of meaning-making to 'sell' the decision to go to war to the domestic audience."[783] However much it falls short of its objectives, today's IR theory nevertheless aspires to its original, idealized image: what Carr called the method by which morality in international politics is exposed "a succession of phenomena governed by mechanical laws of causation."[784]

IR theory has demonstrated the advantages and the disadvantage of its pursuit of causal regularities. Using his methods, the positivist theorist can stipulate non-contingent relationships, unify phenomena across time and space, generate plausible causal explanations for broad patterns, develop connections between variables, and predict outcomes based on entire classes of conditions.[785] However, the pursuit of generic causal inference depends on simplification, which means standing at a remove from the speakers under study and black-

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[782] Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics*, xxii.

[783] Butler, *Selling a 'Just' War*, 13; M Baum, *Infotainment Wars: Public Opinion and Wars in the Age of Soft News* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2003).

[784] *Carr,* The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 13.*

[785] "The essence of scientific explanation can be described as *nomic expectability*—that is expectability on the basis of lawful connections." Wesley C. Salmon, *Four Decades of Scientific Explanation* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Carl G. Hempel and Paul Oppenheim, "Studies in the Logic of Explanation," *Philosophy of science* 15, no. 2 (1948). "It has been hoped since the time of the early positivists that by imitating the successful components of natural scientific methodology, one might arrive at accurate predictions and law-like explanations of human behavior." Lee C. McIntyre, *Laws and Explanation in the Social Sciences* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1996), 5.

boxing their intentions. "Simplifications lay bare the essential elements in play and indicate the necessary relations of cause and interdependency," says Waltz.[786] Indeed, Waltz's neorealism explicitly rejects the accuracy of its own assumptions about human nature, claiming that assumptions are analytical heuristics used to generate testable predictions. The system's structure explains outcomes, and these outcomes "cannot be inferred from intentions and behaviors."[787] To focus on the aims, policies, or actions of states is to "describe" events, but "from simple descriptions no valid generalizations can logically be drawn."[788]

The positivist pursuit of valid generalizations and panoptic causal explanations is strikingly evident in explanatory accounts of the late-nineteenth century strategic shift in American foreign policy. Decisions and opinions during this period are treated as outcomes or manifestations following from, as if by syllogistic necessity, antecedent factors—whether economic, strategic, or cultural—that acted upon the era's feeble political participants. According to these explanations, America's expansionist shift was the realization of overwhelming domestic and international pressures relating to the increase of state capabilities, the relative expansion of executive power, the economic needs of domestic interests, or a cultural *zeitgeist* that seized the minds of the public and the elite. Accordingly, these same factors are used to explain that the period immediately preceding American expansion was futile and temporary delay of, if not preparation for, American expansion.

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[786] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 10.
[787] Waltz, 74.
[788] Waltz, 65.

These explanations of America's strategic shift, like IR theory more generally, purport to explain by predicting outcomes according to hypothesized structural determinants. Yet even accepting Waltz's distinctions about what counts as a theory with "explanatory power," we are free to ask: what *relevance* is a causal explanation that "abstract from reality," eschews investigation of intentions in favor of predicting "outcomes," and reduces human conduct to "the essential elements" defined by, and is apparent to, only the trained observer?[789]

We need not answer this question ourselves, for the answer is implied in the very theories that seek these causal explanations. After all, most of these accounts do not entirely sterilize their inquiry by refraining from proper names and abstracting from the specific intentions of the actors under study. In other words, even IR theories that greatly simplify and "depart from reality" of human motives in order to pursue abstract causal patterns cannot help but demonstrate that the inescapable determinants of action, such as the pursuit of "relative power" or the powerful needs of "economic interests," had particular effects on—or were particular manifestations of—particular, important people on the scene. The point here is *not* that these IR theories contradict themselves when they speak of intentions or purposes; they do not. Rather, the point is that these theories implicitly concede the limited relevance of any causal theory that does not also say something—however cursorily or inadequately—about who the actors were, what they believed, and what they intended to achieve with their

[789] Waltz, 68, 10.

foreign policies. They are theories that seek to explain the causes of outcomes while conceding in their practice the limited relevance of explaining reality as what Carr called "a succession of phenomena governed by mechanical laws of causation."[790]

However incidental, the tendency to explain foreign policy not merely as *outcome* but also as purposeful *action* that no social scientist who is committed to causal inquiry that abstracts from human intentions and human freedom truly accepts the relevance of his theory. However wedded to his model, the social scientist is ultimately dealing with behavior and speech that is meaningful and purposeful, reflecting the specific priorities and intentions of an expressive agent.[791] Indeed, the scientist cannot explain his own purpose of inquiry as an effect of a mechanical process. As Carr himself observed, generic causal theorization is, on its own, irrelevant, and the IR theorist pursuing an "underlying reality" of mechanistic causation "is ultimately compelled to believe not only that there is something which man ought to think and do, but that there is something which he can think and do, and that his thought and action are neither mechanical nor meaningless."[792]

Carr's insight points to the inherent limits of the nomological characteristic of IR scholarship, and specifically the limits of theorization of foreign policy that treats a "cause" as merely "an effect, result, or consequence." What is lost in such inquiry is the other dictionary definition of "cause": "a basis for an action or response; a reason"—or "a goal or principle

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[790] *Carr,* The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 13.*
[791] McIntyre, *Laws and Explanation in the Social Sciences*, chapter 5.
[792] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 93.

served with dedication and zeal."[793] Due in part to its commitment to generic explanations as defined by its pursuit of "cause" in the first sense, modern IR theory has proven ill-equipped to understanding it in the latter sense. Insofar as apodeictic "microfoundations" make possible pursuit of causal patterns through scientific detachment from their subjects' speech, they also limit sympathetic inquiry into that speech's moral content, or as an elucidation of purpose. Such content deserves careful analysis in its own terms by stepping into the world of the statesman and seeing the situation from his perspective. For if this content is not a wholly deceptive instrument of fixed ends or a false construct of context, it may include a moral principle to which the statesman is dedicated, and the "basis for an action" toward that goal or principle. The reason and purpose may then be the, or a, cause of action. In that case, assuming that this moral content is deceptive or false is to distort the subject matter, or to "sacrifice political relevance on the altar of methodology."[794]

Understanding foreign policy from a perspective of intentions reveals that it is not necessary, and perhaps not usually possible, to distinguish between a rhetoric of persuasion and a rhetoric of explanation.[795] The president may indeed have a need or incentive to "sell" his policy in order to advance his agenda. He may also be persuading himself by "framing" his actions in a way consistent with his specific cultural *zeitgeist* or historical milieu. How-

[793] As defined by the American Heritage Dictionary. This insight comes from Seabury and Codevilla, *War: Ends and Means*, 35.
[794] Berns, "Voting Studies," 55.
[795] Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), esp. 1–7.

ever, if the president himself does not present his moral arguments as merely a form of manipulation or a historically conditioned flash in the pan, then it is necessary to at least entertain the possibility that the president may be offering a genuine reason for his action. To "rethink the thoughts" of the president entails, at least at the outset, to accept that his rationalization is what he presents it as—that is, as the impetus for his action.[796]

The relevance of cause understood as reason and purpose in American foreign policy becomes fully evident only by interrogating charitably the specific moral arguments that are attached their decisions. This approach assumes that presidents have a capacity to articulate political and moral responsibilities in foreign affairs. But it does not mean that it necessary to treat statesmen as scholars of international theory. Neither Cleveland nor McKinley spent his evenings studying Vattel or holding seminars on Grotius. In his private correspondence and public messages about foreign policy, neither president appealed to Wolff or Pufendorf. That was perfectly ordinary. No less ordinary, however, was their thoughtful moral discernment in formulating foreign policy in ways that do not conform to narrow conceptions of the national interests. Few statesmen moonlight as moral theorists. But however removed from academic debates, no statesman understands his job as that of a switchman chained to a railroad track on which the trains of interests are running.[797] As Michael Walzer explains, "We don't

[796] McIntyre, 125; Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.
[797] Hans Heinrich Gerth and Charles Wright Mills, eds. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* Routledge, 1991), 63–64.

have to translate moral talk into interest talk in order to understand it; morality refers in its own way to the real world."[798]

Reviewing our cases, we have no reason to believe that Cleveland or McKinley would agree with the IR scholar who asserts that "interests have chronological precedence over norms in the shaping of national behavior."[799]

In fact, Cleveland explicitly and repeatedly distinguished between slavish submission to "material interests" and honorable conduct according to the nation's "higher obligations" to itself and the world.[800] Such was the case in Hawaii, where the United States had acted according to the "the odious doctrine" that the strong nation may take advantage of the weaker nation simply by material desire and disapprobation of another sovereign's institutions. Cleveland attempted to reverse the damage, insofar as was possible, by throwing light on the sin and exhorting the nation to live up to its fair name. He argued that a national pursuit of profit and power incommensurate with "international morality" was a degradation of the nation—"not merely…a wrong but…a disgrace"—because it represented conduct beneath the good character of the nation.[801] He conceded that even agreed-upon international rules that serve the interests of all nations are flouted due to myopic opportunism. Yet he denied that this fact liberated America's obligation to them. On the contrary, he said that it is precisely because international rules leave obedience up to the conscience of nations that they present

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[798] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*, 12.
[799] Levi, "The Relative Irrelevance of Moral Norms in International Politics," 197.
[800] "Cleveland Declares for Reciprocity With Cuba." *Los Angeles Herald*, January 23, 1902.
[801] Cleveland, "President's Message Relating to the Hawaiian Islands: December 18, 1893."

an opportunity to a great power to demonstrate its exceptional self-possession, fair dealings, and commitment "to do justice in all things without regard to the strength or weakness of those with whom it deals."[802]

In Venezuela, Cleveland saw the same principle of international morality threatened—this time, by Great Britain's unwillingness to address a weak defendant's incriminating charge of wrongdoing. He and Olney argued that only the United States enjoyed the capability to confront the prospect of incorrigible depravity in the hemisphere and avert a settlement based on the raw dynamics of power. Inaction would have amounted to an irresponsible discrediting of America's public commitment to its security. More importantly, inaction to a public scandal by the only hemispheric power capable of taking action would have amounted to "supine submission to wrong and injustice" because it would have discredited the very international legal order that grounded every nation's sovereign rights.[803] Both during and after the controversy, Cleveland's policy was attacked for introducing unnecessary risks and costs to domestic profit and national security; others, meanwhile sought to justify it as a symbolic form of hemispheric superiority. Cleveland did not dispute the risks and costs of his policy—in fact, he rebuked those who complained in those terms—and he fought efforts that sought to exploit his arbitration policy as a declamation of the nation's authority over the hemisphere.

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[802] Grover Cleveland, "Special Message," December 18, 1893. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=70788.
[803] Cleveland, "Special Message on the Venezuela Boundary Dispute, Washington, D.C., December 17, 1895."

In the case of Cuba, a commitment to an international legal order meant that the United States must pursue its peace-seeking objectives by giving "careful heed to every consideration involving our honor and interest or the international duty we owe to Spain."[804] In contrast to his policies towards Venezuela and Hawaii, Cleveland's Cuba policy did not appear to take up the cause of the small power or hold the larger power to account because, as he explained, this was an international quarrel, not a dispute between international parties. The Cubans were *not* a small power or any power—they were, rather, an administrative patchwork without the means of accepting the burdens and rights of sovereign rule. Short of Spain's direct threat to the American homeland, her abdication of legal responsibilities to America's legal suits and grievances, or her willful and permanent abandonment of her Cuban territory, her presumed legitimacy prohibits any American interference with what he viewed as a legally internal quarrel. In late 1895, Theodore Roosevelt was speaking for many of Cleveland's critics when he told Olney he wished the administration "would take the same line as regards Cuba" as it had with Venezuela.[805] Of course, from Cleveland's perspective, he *was* taking the same line with Cuba. As ever, his foreign policy was a public demonstration of the nation's commitment to a legal order of sovereign nations. In contrast to the Venezuela controversy, the threat to this order came not from Great Britain but from powerful, well-meaning yet ultimately criminal temptations within his own country. Accordingly, he left office proud of his legacy of refusing to yield to humanitarian impulses and his success in

[804] "Annual Message of 1896," in Chadwick, *The Relations of the United States and Spain: Diplomacy*, 483.
[805] Roosevelt to Olney, Dec 20, 1895, quoted in Grenville and Young, 182.

containing them, in large part through his administration's highly effective federal apparatus designed to enforce his government's policy of neutrality.

Cleveland justified his decisions regarding Hawaii, Venezuela, and Cuba in terms consistent with the communitarian understanding of international justice. Informing his arguments was the idea that nations are equally bound to a uniform law of nations, just as individuals in a domestic society are bound to a uniform rule of law. As he said in 1902, "I don't believe that nations, any more than individuals, can safely violate the rules of honesty and fair dealing."[806] Cleveland regarded "international morality" as the highest authority of a nation's conscience and the ultimate source of proscriptions against self-serving conquest and the unscrupulous pursuit of interest.[807] It is a fact of nature that "a strong power may with impunity despoil a weak one of its territory."[808] Yet that fact only adds gravity to the importance of demonstrating moral continence when ill-begotten temptations test self-possession, and the dutiful behavior according to "a high standard of honor and morality."[809]

Like his predecessor, McKinley explicitly distinguished between an unadulterated pursuit of national power or profit and the pursuit of national objectives on terms delimited by the obligations of international justice. However, McKinley did not share Cleveland's understanding of international justice. In his early diplomacy with Madrid, he stressed a far more limited conception of sovereign rights. McKinley, like Cleveland, did not want war but

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[806] "Cleveland Declares for Reciprocity with Cuba."
[807] Cleveland, "President's Message Relating to the Hawaiian Islands: December 18, 1893."
[808] McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman: An Authorized Biography*, 65.
[809] McElroy, 66.

pronounced his country's right to take action at the moment when its security is threatened. Unlike Cleveland, he did not view Spain's fulfillment of her legal obligations as justification for what he derided as "a policy of mere inaction."[810] Whereas Cleveland expressed a willingness (if not an eagerness) for Spain to extinguish its internal problems brutally, McKinley announced his unwillingness to countenance Spain's unlimited military policy, even if it promised pacification. He averred that Spain's war was now to be "conducted according to the military codes of civilization."[811] In effect, McKinley reversed Cleveland's declaration that humanitarian duties are circumscribed by the "international duty we owe to Spain." Having connected the nation's self-respect with the basic welfare of Cubans, he effectively abrogated Spain's sovereign jurisdiction, measuring the success of his diplomacy according to the improvement of local conditions. In words not lost on Madrid, he conveyed that failure to improve conditions on the island would trigger "a duty imposed by our obligations to ourselves, to civilization and humanity to intervene with force."[812] Significantly, McKinley articulated his duty to prevent what he viewed as a contemptible peace before, during, and after, the cataclysmic episodes of 1898 that are thought to have, directly or indirectly, "forced" him into war.[813] Indeed, McKinley doggedly pursued his humanitarian objectives diplomatically amid the public clamor, and would later boast that the United States never lost command of its

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[810] Mr. Sherman to Mr. Dupuy de Lôme, June 26, 1897. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 507.
[811] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1897, 508.
[812] "Message Regarding Cuban Civil War, April 11, 1898," in McKinley, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897.*
[813] "Message Regarding Cuban Civil War, April 11, 1898," in McKinley, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789–1897.*

scruples, taking action against Spain on its own terms—that is, on his administration's well-considered, noble objectives to finally address "the piteous appeals of the starving and oppressed inhabitants of Cuba."[814]

McKinley could not say quite the same regarding the Philippines, for his annexation policy was only considered until after the war started. Following the onset of hostilities, McKinley found himself constrained by the military's war strategy—a strategy he had delegated but whose details and implications he had failed to devote his responsible attention. However, the annexation of the Philippines was never a *fait accompli*. Following the Navy's defeat of Manila's Spanish squadron, McKinley studied, but ultimately rejected, alternatives to annexation. If we listen to McKinley, we learn that his intentions do not comport with accounts that portray his decision as a manifestation of the nation's incorrigible pursuit of power and profit. In fact, McKinley never regarded the strategic and economic advantages of military occupation as anything but "incidental" to the supreme "moral duty" of protecting "the welfare and happiness and the rights of the inhabitants" in the Philippines.[815] After committing to war with Spain, he said he became determined to proceed in the only way that corresponds to the war's *raison d'être*. However noble the war's initial aims, it had broken the only defenses of a brittle archipelago. To relinquish the Philippines to chaos or leave them in "the arena of the strife of nations" would have discredited the nation's initial aims

[814] McKinley, "Speech at the Auditorium, Atlanta, Georgia," December 15, 1898, 163.
[815] McKinley, "Speech at Dinner of the Home Market Club, Boston, February 16, 1899," 189.

and constituted "a weak evasion of duty."[816] McKinley's obstinacy in the face of dissent no less well-reasoned may have been foolish. But his obstinacy was also high-minded; he viewed his determination to proceed according to "the same high rule of conduct which guided [the United States] in facing war" as an obligation whose increasingly apparent costs only added to its nobility.[817] "Accepting war for humanity's sake, we must accept all obligations which the war in duty and honor imposed upon us," he said.[818] As he explained, "The peace we have won is not a selfish truce of arms, but one whose conditions presage good to humanity."[819] At the same time, McKinley presented the nation's significant contributions to humanity as redounding to the benefit of the United States in attaining the "most wholesome respect and admiration for this country." The war, he believed, "had placed the United States in a new light."[820] As he put it in a characteristic speech, "Forever in the right, following the best impulses and clinging to high purposes, using properly and within right limits our power and opportunities, honorable reward must inevitably follow." This "honorable reward," made possible by the nation's "high purpose and unselfish sacrifices for struggling peoples" would establish the United States as a "world power" worthy of her position—"a symbol," now on two hemispheres, "of liberty and law, of peace and progress."[821]

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816 McKinley, 188.
817 "Correspondence With the United States Peace Commissioners at Paris, 1898: Instructions to the Peace Commissioners, September 16, 1898," in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 907.
818 McKinley, "Speech at the Auditorium, Chicago, October 18, 1898," 13–34.
819 McKinley, "Speech at the Auditorium, Atlanta, Georgia," December 15, 1898, 163.
820 McKinley was explicitly assenting to his conversationalist's observation. See Olcott, Vol. 1, 306.
821 McKinley, "Speech at the Auditorium, Atlanta, Georgia," December 15, 1898, 161.

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